

Chapter One: ON THE EDGE, LOOKING OUT



I was seven when my Mother's father, Grandpa, took me down to the beach one summer's day. I remember that we walked from our bungalow in Bournemouth, down to the front. I picture quite clearly the yellow trolley buses, like giant insects. I smell the crackle of the sparks of electricity from their arms, mingled with the sweetish smell of the sea. I see Grandpa, white hair sticking out from under his cap, horn-rimmed glasses, and a tweed overcoat, which he always wore. We wandered along the busy promenade, him pointing out interesting sights, just like Romany from 'Out with Romany by the Sea.' I read this a couple of years later, lying on a bunk in the back cabin of their houseboat when I stayed there one summer, whilst Mum was having another baby and Dad was up in London, working for the Admiralty. Reading the book, with its rough, red cardboard cover, embossed with gilt, was better than actually being by the sea. Yet I could smell the sea through the open porthole. And a faint smell of seaweed came from its mildew stained, cut pages. But this particular day was 'Out with Romany by the Beach' and was the real thing. He found a spot on the warm sand for us to sit down. Eventually he took off his coat, grudgingly admitting to the hot day, revealing a creased white short-sleeved shirt. I changed out of my clothes, pulled on my bathers, and started digging furiously with my spade. Clear blue sky, yellow sand, white, fluffy clouds, a single dinghy, leaning over in the water. I'd seen a picture just like this on the cover of The Beano Annual. I finished building a sandcastle, went for a paddle in the cold water, ran back up the beach, sat down next to Grandpa, got up again two minutes later, and started doing acrobatics on the sand. I threw some handsprings, stood up, dived forward and walked on my hands, tried out a couple of back flips, did some head over heels, failed to do a neck spring, came down with a thud, but who cared? I was immersed in my own world, spinning my body through space,

enjoying the sensation of the hot sun, the warm springy sand as I landed, the gulls wheeling above me, copying me. I stopped for a minute, looked around and saw that a small crowd had gathered around me in a circle, adults and children. They were standing watching me, curious, silent, intent; silhouetted against the bright sun. I looked around, took a breath and started again. This time I took risks, swallow dives, a run with a somersault, backward rolls into handstand. I invented moves for myself. I tried a sideways somersault landing with a twist. Eventually I stopped, panting, a little puffed. There was a scattering of applause. I bowed like I'd done in the school play. Then I noticed that Grandpa had taken off his tweed cap, and was passing it around, bottling the crowd.

The audience drifted away, trudging back across the sand. We packed up our things, and he took me to a café on the prom where we sat outside, and I ate egg and chips. He bought me an ice cream for afters as I prattled, whilst he sat silent, smiling from time to time. He paid with the money in his cap, coppers and some silver. Then to complete the outing we went for a ride on the top deck of one of the trolleybuses to round off the afternoon, but it was only later, when we were walking back to our house that he mentioned it. 'Don't tell your Grandma,' he said, then added, 'Don't tell anyone.'

Working Backwards

At the core of this enquiry into the nature of the relationship between the contemporary clown and the institution is the recognition that neither the clown nor the institution, are fixed or static entities, but are in a continual process of becoming, and should be viewed as practices amongst other cultural and societal processes, which are themselves in a constant state of flux. In *Improvisation in Drama* Frost and Yarrow write:

The clown plays. The clown plays the realities of what and where and with whom he finds himself to be. He cannot know those realities in advance, for so much of it depends upon us, the audience, that it cannot be pre-planned. Everything is *new* to the clown. (1990: 68/9; italics in original)

There have been many attempts to define the always changing practices, characteristics, and overarching disposition of the clown (Fo 1991; Lecoq 2002; Wright 2006; Peacock 2009). Wright, for example, has a section in his book in which he identifies three types of clown: 'Simple clown,' 'Pathetic Clown,' and 'Tragic Clown' (2006: 177-248). Studies of the practices of the clown have, amongst numerous others, ranged from the historical (Towsen 1976); the literary (Welsford 1968) to the psychological (Willeford 1969). Louise Peacock's recent study of clown, *Serious Play* (2009), analyses different practices of the contemporary clown, with chapters focusing on the arenas in which clowns perform and the modes of play they adopt, such as 'Clown Healers' (127- 151), which discusses the recent phenomenon of clown doctors; 'Clowns on Stage' (65 – 86); and 'Clowns who Act: Actors who Clown' (87 – 106). Both John Wright and Louise Peacock frame the practices of the clown in different ways. David Robb's comment on the ways of reading the clown is apt: 'Its mask, whatever form it takes – white face, red nose, grotesque features of any kind – is essentially a blank space on which anything can be projected' (2007:1), although the word 'Its' above suggests an objectivity towards the clown. In my view, any attempt to pin down the clown is futile, since the clown has already moved elsewhere. The clown will not be straitjacketed and displays a playful disregard for imposed definition.

Yet my preceding statement is suspect, and turns in on itself, suggesting that the clown may be defined by an absence of definition, by what she is not. How then can I write about the clown in any meaningful way without resorting to overarching definitions which stereotype and generalise the clown? In addition, many of those who write about clown are themselves, or have been at some point in their lives, practicing clowns. Even those who have not been clowns, such as Howard Jacobson in *Seriously Funny* (1997) will freely admit to personal likes and dislikes. I suspect that, for many, memory of their reaction to clowns' performances is what has drawn them to write about clowns in the first place. The standpoint

is consequently subjective, perhaps even partisan, and, in Jacobson's case, polemical. He admits he does not really like clowns, which, in part, explains his fascination. Attempts at objectivity, stating what the clown is or is not, must be treated with extreme caution. So I declare my own bias and admit, for example, that Fo's opinions on clowns are to be taken seriously. He should know after all, and yet his standpoint is also highly subjective. In *The Tricks of the Trade*, he recognises that Jacques Lecoq is '...an exceptional master' (1991:148), but takes issue with the pedagogy of Lecoq, making the assumption that 'It is dangerous to learn techniques unthinkingly when no prior care has been given to the moral context in which they are to be employed' (1991:149). It should be borne in mind throughout this thesis that the opinionated is the name of '*le jeu*'. What does seem to me to be realisable is that my attempt to define the clown is not linked to a specific set of clown characteristics, but with a nexus of clownesque practices, which continually refer back to both the personal, individual standpoint of the writer, and is based on my own experience of practice and records of that practice. From my own experience as a clown practitioner, I would propose that the clown and the practice cannot be separated and that the clown *is* a set of practices. Furthermore, the clown operates within a number of institutions, and the clown requires those institutions to define the practice. Thus one aim of this study is an attempt to trace the threads of my own practice over the last thirty-two years, from 1978, which is when I date the beginning of my career as a professional clown. In addition, my focus is limited to European clown practices, including Russian clowns, and to a lesser extent, USA clowns who have drawn on European practices. I do not analyse other, non-European traditions, such as the shamanistic trickster figure found in many non-European cultures (Towsen 1976: 5-6). There is no attempt to unpick intercultural practices of the clown, and this again is a subjective choice – I am writing about the practices I know.

Coincidentally, within the academic institution over the last thirty five years, from approximately the mid 1970s, there has been a blurring of boundaries between performance forms, and much argument, especially within the broad area of 'Performance Studies' in Higher Education in the UK about the consequent synthesis of various performance forms, especially around interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity. To a large extent, it has occurred since the rise of 'Performance Studies' as a subject for study originated by Richard Schechner

and others, in the USA, which was envisaged as a methodology for all ‘subjects.’ The subject I mostly teach on at The University of Winchester, the BA in Performing Arts, clearly states in the programme’s ‘Definitive Document’:

The nature of contemporary performing arts is generally fluid, experimental and exploratory and, therefore, the Performing Arts programme does not set out to convey or teach to students a single body of knowledge, but enables students to develop, investigate and explore devised contemporary performance practices...
(2004: 4)

This blurring of boundaries can be both exciting and confusing for students, as the programme sits somewhere between Drama Studies and Dance, and challenges notions of practice and form. However this confusion is not only confined to students. In a recent issue of *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, one teacher of Performance Studies who had originally done a traditional Drama degree, found teaching the subject confusing at first; ‘You couldn’t rely on text; there was no transcendental author to refer back to; and history of criticism on which to base your teaching’ (Lavery 2005: 229). Professional theatre critics with expertise in text-based theatre can also find themselves perplexed in their response to work in devised and non-text based performance. Michael Billington, for example, reviewing Shunt’s *Amato Saltone* in *The Guardian*, which the company performed in the vaults under London Bridge station, writes:

I still feel there are strict limits to this kind of theatre of sensation. Having proved they can conjure up weird images out of darkness, I would like to see Shunt move beyond sensory titillation and show they can rise to the demands of narrative. (2006: 38)

One of his proposals is that the company should consider performing a Jacobean play in the space, which not only reveals his subjective view, but also suggests a lack of comprehension of devised, non-narrative work on his part.

Throughout the writing of this tracing of my own practice I have become gradually yet increasingly aware of the emergence of a number of tropes around both my practice as a clown, and the clown’s relationship with a range of institutions with which this study deals,

and by extension with a number of other institutional practices- with text, with the ringmaster in the circus, with the expectations of the audience, with training, with the theatre profession, with my institutionalised self. The tropes I have identified are: theorising practice; practice based research; ownership of practice; agency and selection; and curbing the clown. Writing this part of the study mirrors the process of making a performance in that the writing itself is an exploration of possibilities, which gradually takes on a shape and a content, sometimes through deliberation and discarding and sometimes by accident, as though the material had seeped into my consciousness and waited for me to notice, research and analyse it. Whilst recognising that there is a marshalling, distillation and a synthesis of findings, I am at pains to recognise both a 'descent', as in Foucault (1991: 80), as well as a progression, frequently simultaneously, and both involve a messiness which is not easily signified within a linear structure of a piece of writing, not only due to the stringent demands of a well-structured academic dissertation, but because of the linearity of writing itself.

Because the clownesque, as I have suggested, is not quantifiable, and the definitions of my practice are constantly in flux, theorising my practice is problematic. When I have succeeded in grasping definitions they slip away after a few moments. There is a further difficulty in that there has been little research into the ways to construct a dialogue between recollections of my practice, which are vague and hazy, and my other, critical voice of that practice. The PARIP website - <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/parip> (2004) has a large number of articles and links to other sites which are concerned with Practice as Research, Practice through Research, and Practice Based Research projects, but the drivers of most of them start from the basis of research into performance, rather than from practice itself. My tracing of these projects consists of reflections on and of my practices in clown, none of which have started with a defined research question. These have been creative projects which have neither begun with nor responded to a research agenda, although, as I consider throughout, there have been implicit questions asked of that practice. Thus I have somewhat artificially placed a theoretical frame on my practice, in order to make it academic. In a paper given at the 2003 PARIP conference, Paul Clarke, who was then a lecturer at Dartington College of Arts, and was and still is, the Director of Performance Company 'Uninvited Guests,' asked the pertinent question; *'As a practitioner do I have a proper place from which to speak? I find myself in*

two places at once' (2004:1; italics in original). He then considers the 'symbolic capital' of practice within the academy, and later claims that, 'The practitioner's role oscillates regularly between an internal, somatic experience and an external perspective, between the ground and a place at the top of the theoretical tower' (2004:14). This suggests that in order for the practitioner to be accepted within the academy in the UK she needs to also be a theorist. However there are advantages for the practitioner, and especially for my practice as clown, in being in two places at once and oscillating between foolish roles of the clown and academic, theoretical voices. Trimmingham suggests (2002) that her methodology for Practice as Research, which I discuss later in this chapter, may be adapted and used, as the practitioner-researcher sees fit.

The notion of adaptation of existing methods and theories is appropriate for this study, although theorising the practices of institution through the practices of the clown is doubly complex, so what now follows is a hopeful guide to the reader of the structure of the thesis, which is so arranged in an attempt to replicate the practices of the clown in the institution of the PhD. Thus I include a range of heteroglossia (see Bakhtin 1981) - a clown voice, short fictions (are they fictions?), unreliable memories, that is, 'narratives of the self' (Denzin 1997), asides, direct address to you, the reader, which challenge the dominance of the institutional practice of so-called 'academic' writing. The voices jostle, combine with, disagree, and challenge each other. Further, a key practice of many clowns, to which I refer throughout this thesis, is of continual deferment of performing the actual trick. The clown warily circles the subject, but the clown's attention is side tracked - for my purpose, a key one is where the clown becomes curious and starts to investigate and play with props, set, and audience, anything but do the trick. Allied with this is the clown's dawning realisation that she is consciously, and/or unconsciously, out of step with others - people and objects - around her, and that through the side-tracking, the proper and usual order of institutions is challenged and subverted.

Deferment is therefore deliberately employed in the writing up of this project as a reflexive meta-practice. This is most evident in the misplacing of the various and eclectic theories which frame and support my investigation. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of

the ‘rhizome’ (1988: 3-21), and its offshoots, the ‘radicle’ the ‘root’, and the ‘tree’, is highly appropriate to this study, but it is only realised and briefly discussed, as a throwaway remark in the Conclusion. An important principle - Foucault’s ‘heterotopia’ (1967) which informs this study, is sketched in Chapter Two, on pages 51 -52, in the context of another quotation. And perhaps most importantly, although various practices of the institution are referred to and considered in the first three chapters of this study, it is in Chapter Four ‘King Ubu Goes to Prison’ that there is a sustained discussion of institutional theory, which uses Scott’s sociological analysis of institutions, and his ‘three pillars of the institution’ – the ‘regulative’, the ‘normative’ and the ‘cultural-cognitive’ (Scott 2008). This attempt in writing to replicate the practices of deferment and subversion by the clown, de-structures the narrative, yet also manifests the need for a recognisable structure against which and within which the clown operates. However, the placing of ‘neo-institutional’ theory in Chapter Four is not entirely random, as it also recognises that the analysis of institutional theory fits with the focus of Chapter Four, which considers a production of *King Ubu* (2007) in a prison. Likewise the focus of Chapter Five is of various deconstructions of *Hamlet* by students in the University of Winchester. Thus these two chapters are concerned with institutions which, at first sight, are instantly recognisable as institutions, clearly delineated, seemingly solid and unambiguous, and easily contextualised. Placing the theories at this point is an attempt to confound monolithic views of the institution and guide the reader through the ambiguities of both.

(Of course, dear reader, you are invited, should you so wish, to go straight to these passages. But then you would miss the pleasure of surprise, anticipation, and excitement when you arrive. You would be refusing to play. Oh well, if you really must...)

Where do I stand then?

This leads me to clarify my position vis a vis theory. As a practitioner-researcher I am aware that in Higher Education in the UK there is currently a great deal of discussion about the numerous ways in which practice and theory inform each other. There has been a growing recognition for the last thirty years that the practice and theorising of that practice are inextricably bound up together. In a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze in 1972,

Intellectuals and Power, the context of which is a discussion around protest and revolt against State repression, Deleuze repositions the relationship between theory and practice; ‘The relationships between theory and practice are far more partial and fragmentary’ (Foucault 1977: 205). Later in the same article he states that ‘No theory can develop without encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall’ (1977: 206). Further he suggests that:

A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate. We don’t revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others. (1977: 208)

I have some concerns that the above quotation suggests that the practice comes after the theory, but I am in general agreement with it, and would further add, and almost certainly expect, that the clown would make unorthodox, subversive and playful use of a box of tools; a use which questions the very nature and application of tools.

Moving beyond a discussion of academic validation of practice, yet nevertheless pertinent to my focus on clown practices and institutions, and supporting my de-structuring of the narrative of theory, is a contemporary, more general, suspicion of the notion of ‘form’ itself. A quotation in the June 2005 edition of *Performance Research*, entitled *On Form/Yet to Come*, by the Editor, Ric Allsop, is pertinent for this project:

Form and its relationship to time- to the yet-to-come- its relationship to politics, to space, to cultural environment, is perhaps no longer to be used in its more conventional association with the imposition of fixed organizational frameworks on the material and contexts of performance, but in an active sense of processes of formation, the sets of relational processes that reflect the intensities, differences, transformations and translations that constitute the work of performance. (2005:1)

This tracing, then, employs what I would term ‘enmeshment’, being concerned with my own practice, and by extension my selves. Tracing the threads of this practice should not be seen as a linearity or a progression, which proceeds in clear and gradual steps. Although cause and effect are clear to me, these threads should be viewed as a means by which I can trace my footsteps back to what I shall pragmatically call the beginning of my practice. My method, therefore, consists of reflection upon and critique of my changing and developing practices as a clown over the last thirty-three years. This practice has various associations with the practices of other individuals and companies, some of whom I have worked with, some of whom I have seen, some others have told me about, some I have trained with, some discussed clowning with. Many have inspired me and made me consider my practice and my writing about my practice through their writing. Not all of this nexus of influence have been clowns or written about clowns, nor are they experts in the field of contemporary clowning. Nevertheless, they are all of great importance in helping me understand my own practice. Yet the concept of a nexus makes it appear that there is a binary between them and myself: the books, the individuals, the groups. This is a false assumption. Always I am imbricated in the nexus in a clownesque way, sometimes taking a central position but frequently on the margins of my own life, both looking in and looking out, as the Circus clown stands on the edge of the ring, having just been thrown out by the ringmaster, representative of the institution, where, only a few minutes earlier the clown held the centre. The eyes of the audience are drawn to the fool on the edge of the action, as his eyes signal to them. I imagine this clown saying; ‘Look at me...don’t look at me.’ Clowns have frequently been reprimanded for upstaging the main act happening in the ring, although more cunning ringmasters permit the clown to upstage the acts to some extent and at certain times. The permission is apparently random and the power may be withdrawn at any time, with no reason forthcoming and no notice. Sometimes the cunning clown will upstage the act in the ring by signaling to the spectators that they should be watching the act and not him. This only makes them watch him more closely. In this case the clown is saying; ‘Don’t look at me... look at me.’

The Threads of Memory

In *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001) Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks compare the traces of what is left over from a performance to those of an archaeological dig. What remains are a few artifacts: rehearsal notes, journal notes, photographs, video, sometimes, but not always, a play text, from which an attempt is made to reconstitute a particular performance or set of performances. Often these may not be in the possession of the actual performance company, and the photographer and creator may be forgotten or not archived. This is in fact what survives of the performances I have been involved in as a clown, especially since most of them have been devised and created through the embodied practice of doing, which may involve some writing, but the doing by writing is not fore-grounded. As a core member of the clown company Zippo & Co from 1978-1986, one of our much loved expressions when we started making a new show or clown entrée was, 'It's time to move our bodies through space.' This saying amused us, in its parody of 'luvvie speak' but in effect it was a shared phrase to enable us to get into clown mode. It was also an accurate reflection of our devising method. We went through space, as well as being in space. In addition I would add that memory, both individual and collective is, perhaps, one of the key traces that remain from my practice, partial, selective and unreliable though it/they may be. As Peggy Phelan states in her introduction to *The Ends of Performance*; 'If the past is something we encounter in the future tense of our yet to be realized interpretation, we must realize the cast of that retemporising' (1998: 9). Although this thought is in the context of new technologies and the 'memory' of a computer, it succinctly suggests that the actual acts, that is, what happened, will be reinterpreted through the vagaries of memory in the retelling. Many of my performances, such as *The Misguided Tour* (1991?-2010), have been largely improvised, take place outdoors and are site-generic in that each performance responds to a different site; the complexities of which I shall consider in Chapter Two. No archived material can be said to be representative of that project, but what I do have left is my memories. What there is left for an audience of the live event is the frequently quite powerful, yet flickering, memory.

For the purposes of this writing up I am part-archaeologist, part-ethnographer, and part-historian and, since memory plays an extremely large part in this aspect of thread tracing, it is

significant that one of the companies who inspired me to pursue my own work, the Lecoq trained Theatre de Complicite (now simply Complicite), created *Mnemonic* (1999), which I saw at the Riverside Studios in 2003, which explored memory, and the reconstruction of a personal and collective European past. As Helen Freshwater notes, in an article on the production:

Complicite's exploration of the workings of memory is timely. A preoccupation with memory is nothing short of a contemporary obsession. A society fascinated with psychoanalysis, we have accepted the idea that past experience produces identity, and are accustomed to drawing sets of causal links between our personal history and our sense of self. (2001: 213)

I confess that there may be unreliability in my account of the project, yet I would nevertheless maintain that the Richard Cuming version is a valid version, inviting the reader to be a conspirator and participant in the project; to be complicit.

Tracing the threads of my own practice is, therefore, unscientific, wayward and refuses to be pinned down. I placed a question mark after the first date of *The Misguided Tour*, since the question that immediately springs to mind is: which tour? It started as a solo tour in 1991, which I performed once at the Glastonbury Festival, but was again resurrected for one performance in 1993 as a duo with an actor friend, Martin Broad, who is actually tall and thin. Ten years later it was reworked with John Lee, produced by Sally Mann for two performances in 2003. In 2004 and throughout 2005, it became a trio with myself, John and Sally. We were asked to perform it several times and in several venues in 2006, then performed it regularly at festivals from 2007 – 2009, and resurrected it as it was commissioned for one performance in 2010. Throughout this time it was considerably reworked. In order to convey the messiness of the project of retracing, as I have noted, I inscribe a clown voice within the traditional institutional academic voice, but not in opposition. I occasionally include notes of performance, scribbled journal entries, reflections, story and the odd photograph. This performative writing is a methodology to recreate, at least in part, the materiality/immateriality of that practice. It casts it in another mode, and much of this study is taken up with the process of 'uncovering.' To do this I have, to some extent, to cover up, to create a mask of

words. This replicates the use of the mask as a training tool for actors, which conceals and reveals at the same time. In addition, this discursive performative writing runs counter to the already achieved and expert: she who knows and has the power to know. It is, in fact, the voice of the clown disguised as a scholar researching his own and others' practice.

Whilst I am aware of the vagaries of form, to proceed at all I need to make clear distinctions and, where necessary, identify and select different attributes and examples of my clown practice appropriate to the focus of this study. There have been five strands to my practice as a clown - performer, teacher, director, deviser and student - which, for the purposes of this study, I separate, although in reality they are intertwined, in a symbiotic and hermeneutic relationship. Throughout this writing I have gradually come to realise that they may all be synthesised in what I term, the 'dramaturg clown', whose practice I explore in Chapter Six. In addition, some of my practice has been, to all intents and purposes solo, some has been collaborative to varying degrees, and some has been where I have been a hired hand. In this chapter I give a general overview of my practice by considering the beginning of my practice in the UK, in the late 1970s, when there arose a renewed interest, almost a surge, in clowns and clowning. It was interesting that, at the Independent Street Arts Network conference, on 2nd and 3rd December 2005, Joop Mulder, Director of the Oerol Festival in Terschelling, the Netherlands, suggested that, in his experience '...the eighties were clown, the nineties were collaborative, and the noughties are site-specific' (Mulder 2005). This broadly mirrors the development of my own practice. I shall contextualise this with reference to wider performance ecology at this time, but also placing this spread of interest in an historical and social context, considering the question of what do the range of practices of the clown reveal about the landscape of institutions throughout the late twentieth century? Whilst this is not a history of the practices of the clown, it will use 'genealogy' (Foucault 1991: 76-100) to place my practice as a clown in a wider context.

The year 2000 is a significant date for my practice, as it was the year that I began lecturing, at first part-time and hourly paid, at King Alfred's College, Winchester (now the University of Winchester). I moved from being a free-lance performer working in a range of institutions, to becoming employed primarily by one particular institution. My practice

projects were sanctioned by that institution, and took place under the remit of its research. Around this time my interest in the clown and the relationship to institution and institutional practices began. Further, my hitherto implicit research started to become explicit, defined, validated and formalised by the practices of the institution. This date is also key for my practice in that I began to move away from performance which was recognisably that of clown, to a synthesis of clowning and the popular with other performance and visual art forms, including durational performance, nomadic performance, use of technology, and, more recently, installation and sound. These practice-based projects have involved me in a continual reassessment of both my practice and the relationship of the clown to other performance practices. There have been four main projects which I collaborated upon and performed in: *The Family Outing Caravan Holiday* (2000); *The Misguided Tour* (1991?-2010), which I discuss in Chapter Two; *Café Lente* (2005-6); and *The Village Fete* (2009-10), which I discuss in Chapter Six. There have been two other projects in which I was involved as performer and clown specialist within the University, lecturer Rob Conkie's adaptations of Shakespeare - *The Commedia of Errors* (2002); and *Othellophobia* (2004). These were both projects based within the institution, but ones, although into which I had some input, were not specifically based around my own practice. In addition, I have been directly involved in two other projects I have already mentioned: *King Ubu* (2007), a collaboration between the University and West Hill Prison, Winchester, which I analyse in Chapter Four; and a Research Informed Teaching project each year from 2003-10, *Fooling Hamlet*, which I reflect upon in Chapter Five. In Chapter Two, 'Three's Company' I shall compare the practice of the trio I performed with between 1978-1986, Zippo and Co, with the trio I have performed with since 2000 focusing on the most recent incarnation of *The Misguided Tour*.

A vital thread, apart from my individual perception of my practice that links the disparate elements of this tracing, is an increasing concern with the institutionalised training of the clown, which I explore more fully in Chapter Three. I include a section on the visual signifiers of the clown, and the ways in which clowns employ the signifiers to mark their transgressions, as well as serving the double purpose of both reassurance, ('It's only a clown'), and threat ('He's scary'). The most obvious, but by no means the only, signifier, is the red nose of the clown, which according to Lecoq, in relationship to the pedagogy at his School:

... it was Pierre Byland, a student at the school before he returned to teach here, who first introduced the famous *red nose*, the smallest mask in the world, which would help people to realize their naiveté and their fragility. (2002: 145; italics in original).

Costume and/or makeup, the ‘motley,’ as well as movement and other physical signifiers, especially the personal, individual body, provide other immediate signifiers. My practice has involved playing with and challenging these signifiers, partly in an attempt to discover what happens with the relationship with the audience when the clown takes away the signifiers, but also to research how little and conversely, how much, is required for an audience to mentally point and say ‘clown.’ This is especially important in those non-dedicated spaces which are frequently the contemporary clown’s performance arena: the street, the circus ring, the festival.

Writing up/writing down

There are three key texts, which have provided a foundation for my approach to this research, and although I have discussed the different modes of writing running throughout, I shall now consider these texts which have informed these different voices. As I have noted, one of the major difficulties of documenting practice is the attempt to reproduce, in a different form, a particular performance, especially when the re-presentation is one’s own work. Melissa Trimingham in *A Methodology for Practice as Research* (2002) suggests employing the ‘hermeneutic-interpretative’ model for practice as a tool for research, in which practice is an outcome of research. She considers that the model should be perceived as ‘A spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding’ (2002: 56). She then continues; ‘For the purposes of writing up we exit the spiral temporarily’ (2002: 56). I develop this to suggest that the writing up itself becomes another practice, which will benefit from Trimingham’s methodology, so that the process of writing up becomes a spiral, which is constantly being rewritten, and behind this so-called finished draft are the ghosts of every draft of this chapter. For me a performance is never wholly finished, since the threads of each project are woven through my entire practice, so there is a sense in which this thesis is

unfinished, although I will eventually declare it finished. However, it is in reality another, perhaps more satisfactory, draft. Trimingham also states; ‘We need a methodology that can account for the disorderly, creative process and yet demonstrates rigorous planning’ (2002: 55). Trimingham warns that Practice as Research can be interpreted in a number of ways, and frequently the term has been employed as a catchall to denote any and all forms of practice. Yet although the starting point of the projects I discuss was the desire to make performance, rather than research performance, I have, albeit vaguely and informally by institutional standards, attempted to understand the nature of my clowning for myself.

My attempts to understand the nature of clowning, makes the issue of an overarching methodology for this project a complex one, because, as I have been at pains to make clear, the issues of research around my own practice have been complex, and this much used term ‘practice as research’ needs some further sketching. Trimingham’s concept of spiral works practically to a large extent for the more recent projects I have been involved in during the course of this research, as they have taken place under the auspices of researching the practices of the clown within the practices of the institution. I would argue, however, that the spiral visualises a continuous development and upward progression, a teleology towards the perfect show. My practice has not always been so fortunate; there have been many stops, stalls, false starts, struggles and failures. The spiral itself is not fixed but may be in motion, and an appropriate metaphor for the clown is the children’s toy, the ‘slinky’, which often falls over, stops, and is too short, in its admittedly downward progression on the stairs. Even when it is at rest it is flexible and wobbly.

At the recent *Articulating Practice* symposium (2011), which focused on how practice might be articulated in various ways, including writing, one of the speakers Brad Haseman, used the term ‘Practice-led Research’ instead of the more usual term, Practice-as Research (Haseman 2011). Another speaker, Robin Nelson commented that he felt that ‘Practice-led research’ was concerned with reflecting back on practice, rather than practice being the most appropriate way to demonstrate the outcome of a creative research enquiry (Nelson 2011). There is an ongoing and productive argument about the different terminologies and how they might be used, but my position is that practice-led research is an appropriate term to describe

the reflections on my practice prior to beginning this study. The rider is, that although my projects were not framed as academic research, and did not start from a research focus, there was a continual enquiry into the practices of the clown; I have called this ‘implicit research’ throughout, although this term is still somewhat unsatisfactory, as, for example, when I became a solo clown in 1986, my openly declared aim was to explore how much I could divest myself of the traditional clown ‘motley’ and still call myself a clown (see photograph on page 78). I was undertaking research, but it was not until 2000 when I began to research creative practice methodologies, that I was able to attempt to frame and articulate this research in academic terms, again responding to institutional practices in defining the messiness of practice. And there is still some clownesque slippage between these two periods 1978- 2000, and 2000 -2011, as *The Misguided Tour* straddles both, and has, during the latter period, become explicitly articulated as research. So I would suggest that although ‘practice as research’ is a useful term to employ, and subsumes ‘practice-led’ and ‘reflective practice’, yet again the actual practices of the clown are not easily pinned down, and slip away from theoretical and methodological definitions and frameworks.

I shall now focus on the second key text which is Norman Denzin’s *Interpretive Ethnography* (1997), especially the chapter ‘Performance Texts’ (pp. 90 - 125) in which, from the perspective of ‘...ethnographic writing in the twilight years of the twentieth century - ethnography’s sixth moment’ (1997: xi) he explores a range of different modes of writing which ethnographers have employed, in an attempt to avoid the trap of privileging the observer, and to challenge received standards of academic writing which rely on the linear, the intellectual and which discount embodied experience and the standpoint of the ethnographer. He maintains that such a mode of writing is as a performance text itself, which stands for the results of ethnographic research. It should be noted that Denzin’s understanding of ‘performance text’ is generally limited to texts which are written, and do not appear to include either the improvised or the oral. Neither do his suggestions for the performance text consider that they may be placed alongside and enmeshed with other modes of writing or that they are provisional. His text is an alternative to the academic text, rather than being another text juxtaposed with other ways of expression. In Chapter Two I borrow from and extend both Trimingham’s and Denzin’s theories to construct a way of writing about the clown which will

reveal the clown, whilst admitting that, firstly, THE clown does not exist, and, secondly, that I cannot reveal the clown in any case.

The third key text is Foucault's *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1991). In this essay Foucault performs his own genealogical commentary on Nietzsche's polemical work of 1886, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1996). This allows Foucault to undertake several operations: firstly, he discusses and develops his concept of genealogy, drawing on Nietzsche as a basis; secondly, he discusses the ways that his understanding of genealogy may be used as a method to trace the complex and partial historical documents, which have generally been seen as true records; thirdly, by undertaking a commentary of Nietzsche's genealogy, Foucault himself demonstrates how the method may be used in exploring and understanding a text; and fourthly, Foucault develops his discussion of genealogy into a wider discourse about the perspectival nature of truth and the struggle to reconcile competing understandings of 'the truth.' In addition, Foucault not only discusses the particular and disputed meanings of Nietzsche's genealogical terminology, for example, the '...two uses of the word *Ursprung*' (1991: 77), but also discusses how Nietzsche himself challenged a linear and teleological understanding of history:

Historians take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy-the unavoidable obstacles of their passion. Nietzsche's version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice. (1991: 90)

This essay is particularly important for my attempt to trace the thread of my own practice, for I am relying a great deal on my own and others' memories of my clowning, as well as key documents, which are not exhaustive, and are frequently the trace of a trace, such as Tristan Rémy's *Entrées Clownesques* (1962), which is a record of sixty Circus Clown entrées¹, which had been passed from clown to clown and had not previously been documented in written form. The entrées reveal that the material is not owned by a particular clown or troupe but belongs to the general domain of clowning:

¹ A clown 'entrée' is a self-contained circus clown act. See Chapter Two for a sustained discussion.

Les entrées présentées ici n'appartiennent en propre à aucun des clowns que nous avons consultés, mais font partie d'un répertoire collectif que tous les comiques de cirque (bouffons, grotesques, clowns, mimes, pitres, burlesques) ont enrichi depuis cent ans (1962: 32).²

Joel Schechter, in his introduction to *Popular Theatre: a sourcebook* (2003: 3-11) confirms that discourse on Popular Theatre is doubly difficult in that many of the particular performance events have not been written down or documented. They were not texts as a playscript is a text, however overlaid and altered by actors and directors. Moreover, scholarship of popular forms was, until relatively recently, not of great concern for scholarly and academic study. There is a further difficulty in that the actual records of popular performance have not been plentiful, and there has been a tendency for critics and academics to privilege high art over the popular. This may still be seen today, in that, for example, although there is a burgeoning appreciation of Street Arts, there is still relatively little serious and scholarly criticism of it, nor an acknowledgement of its importance to contemporary performance. In *Time Out*, Jane Edwards' preview of the French Company 'Royale de Luxe's' *The Sultan's Elephant*, a nomadic performance featuring giant puppets, relies on a jokey, somewhat patronising tone in writing about their visit to London in May 2006: 'The elephant lifts its feet, raises its trunk, sprays the crowd, takes a piss and shuts its eyelids' (Edwards 2006: 32). On the other hand, the tone of this article does make the performance sound extremely attractive and entertaining for a popular audience, and it could be argued that the lack of critical attention paid allows for subversion and experiment, and that the humorous tone of the review may be the best way to document the event. Yet she is previewing a large and well-funded event, produced by the arts company Artichoke, whose directors had previously run the Salisbury International Festival, and it is notable that Royale de Luxe is a prestigious and extremely well-funded European company. Apart from Bim Mason's *Street Theatre and Other Outdoor Performance* (1992) I have very rarely read any critical reviews of the buskers in Covent Garden, and although there was a symposium on Street Arts in 2002, in the subsequent

² 'The entrées presented here do not belong to any of the particular clowns we have consulted, but are part of a collective repertoire which all circus comics (buffoons, grotesques, clowns, mimes, fall guys, burlesques) have enriched over the last one hundred years'. (My translation).

publication, *Street Arts: A User's Guide* (Max-Pryor 2003) the articles, my own included (Cuming 2003: 46-47), tended to concentrate on the art rather than the popular entertainment.

Three important themes of Foucault's discourse for the purpose of this study are, firstly, the importance of the small and the overlooked: 'Effective history, on the other hand, shortens its vision to those things nearest to it - the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion and energies' (1991: 89). Foucault does warn that to study, '...what is closest,' requires '... abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance..' (1991: 89). Secondly, Foucault remarks that; 'Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival' (1991: 94). These two themes are especially important for both the study and the writing of my tracing, since, for me, the gradual shifts in perception, the barely noticed, and the unremarked reveal to me the development of my own clowning, much more than the monumental and seismic. The third key theme is the recovery of forgotten stories and narratives, which allow the individual to both reclaim an identity, but also to challenge received and institutionalised knowledge, and by implication, power. On both a personal and political level this is vital for my study.

Foucault is insistent on the necessity of close study of all available documents, but is aware of the partial nature of those documents; 'Genealogy is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times' (1991: 76). This is especially resonant for my study, as much writing on clown, as I have already suggested, is open to questions of veracity, and is mired in myth and legend, not least from clowns themselves. I differ from Foucault inasmuch as, in tracing the threads of my practice I am, of course, not only scrutinising documentary evidence but am employing a variety of methodologies, including, as I have stated, a range of forms of practice, my own and others', including experimenting with alternative modes of writing as a practice.

Historically Speaking/Writing

I shall now turn to consider the place of the clown in the wider performance ecology from 1978, the year that I began clowning professionally. From approximately the mid 1970s in

Europe and North America, there was a renewed interest from a number of theatre practitioners in the figure of the clown, although this had little to do with the traditional circus clown. Indeed, one of the key figures in the renewal of interest, Jacques Lecoq, had recently stated in an article *Mime, Movement, Theatre*, ‘For several years the study of clowns has taken on a larger importance in the school, not in the sense of the traditional circus, which is dead, but in searching out the ridiculous in man’ (Lecoq 1973: 153). Instead, these practitioners were attracted by the possibilities of the clown as an area of training for the actor. This was led by Lecoq’s training at his school, the École Jacques Lecoq, and more recently by his student and later teacher at the school, Philippe Gaulier. Secondly, a number of companies in Europe, Australia and the United States wanted to explore the ways in which the figure and practices of the clown might be used in performance; for example, Footsbarn and Kaboodle in the 1970s; Theatre de Complicite in the 1980s. This exploration mainly occurred in ‘alternative’ theatre, which had been developing from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and, amongst other things, renewed a focus on the practices of the body in performance (see Craig 1980; Itzin 1980; Kershaw 1992 and 1999).

In *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* Simon Shepherd suggests three reasons for the ‘...causes of the contemporary interest in the body’ (2006: 2). He proposes two historical narratives: feminism and the, ‘...emergence of body art itself’ (2006: 3). The third narrative, and key for this project, is the contemporary scientific and philosophical research into the interconnectedness of the mind and body, and the concept of ‘embodied knowledge’ as evinced by Lakoff and Johnson in *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), for example. As Shepherd notes about the body in performance:

It may be the casing for an emotional inner life; it may be the substance to be purged; it may become transcendent through disorderly sensualities; it may work as mechanically as a puppet. What remains common is that it is a living entity that occupies a finite amount of space and has its own mass, energy and motor capacity. It is a material presence. As such it produces knowledge of itself and impacts upon the senses of others. (Shepherd 2006: 6)

This quotation resonates enormously with my personal and individual development as a clown in particular, and as practitioner in general. From an historical perspective, however, I would argue that one of the key events, which bolstered renewed interest in the practices of the clown in the UK, was the founding of the London International Mime Festival in 1977 by producer Joseph Seelig and mime clown Nola Rae (*London International Mime Festival*, no date) and has continued every year since then. Its aims at that time were threefold. Firstly, it was responding to the burgeoning growth in what was later to be entitled ‘physical theatre’, which was, at that time, much more developed in Continental Europe and North America. A second aim was to promote and develop a marginalised genre of performance: mime. A third aim was to challenge and attempt to change the perception of mime in the UK as the province of the leotard clad, white faced individual who gets stuck in an ever shrinking glass box, although in this it may have been only partially successful with the general public. In a straw poll I conducted over Christmas 2005, amongst 30 friends and relations, who are not involved in theatre, asking them to name a mime artist, all immediately said ‘Marcel Marceau,’ which is likely to have been exactly the same response as it would have been in 1977. It is evident, however, that the Festival has had an enormous impact upon and helped develop the perception and understanding of ‘mime’ amongst regular theatregoers, practitioners and producers, which in turn has helped develop the interest and growth in devised performance.

A search through the archive of the Festival, reveals that clown-based performance has been an important strand throughout the years of its existence (*London International Mime Festival*, no date). Other strands have included masked performance, including *commedia dell’arte*; movement based performance, influenced by Etienne Decroux; from the mid-eighties on so -called ‘New Circus’, reflecting the growth of this form; and more recently, performance from former Soviet Bloc countries, especially Russia. There is also currently a developing strand of puppetry and animation, as well as collaborative work between countries. What is also apparent is that, from the first Festival in 1977 it championed popular forms rather than the experimental, although, at this time, the rediscovery of popular forms in the UK synthesised with the experimental. This also coincided with the emergence of the then small number of graduates from the École Jacques Lecoq. Lecoq’s teaching is committed to exploring, developing and employing several popular forms, including clown, masked play

and melodrama. This teaching has been extremely influential on many contemporary practitioners in the UK, and I would argue that his concept of clowning, specifically ‘...the exploration for one’s own clown’ (Lecoq 1973: 153), and later as ‘...the search for one’s own clown’ (Lecoq 2006: 114 -116) has become the dominant view of clown practice by practitioners in the UK. As Lecoq graduate, Beatrice Pemberton states, in an interview with Simon Murray about Lecoq’s teaching in *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*:

There’s a rejection of things which are esoteric or ‘arty’ very, very much. He says ‘would my sister understand this’ as a kind of criteria for how clear a piece is. Pieces must work for a general audience. All these styles- commedia, melodrama, clowns- they are popular forms aren’t they? (Murray 2002: 40).

Although I am of the opinion that there was renewed interest in the practices of the clown in the late 1970s, this is not necessarily borne out by contemporary critics. In a two-page article in *Time Out* on 6th Sept 1979, ‘Mime in Different Masks,’ the journalist Jan Murray interviewed both Nola Rae and Moving Picture Mime Show, who were both about to embark upon London runs. Although she mentions clowning several times in relation to Nola Rae, who was about to perform at The Old Vic with *Some Great Fools from History* and *Futurefool*, it is generally as a subset of mime, and she does not ever mention clown in relation to Moving Picture Mime Show. However she does write:

Their skills - juggling and acrobatics, facial mobility and precise timing - stem from the circus and the music hall, and hence carry an element of nostalgia. The work of these talented artists may not satisfy every taste, but at their best, they carry a clout which lies far beyond words. (1979: 25)

This obliquely but aptly describes many of the attributes of these alternative clowns during the early 1980s.

Reading through the archive of companies who have performed at the London International Mime Festival, there is a company called *Zippo* who performed in January 1979. This company consisted of a trio, Zippo (Martin Burton), Tommy and a musician/percussionist, Stix. I played Tommy and was a founder member of that company

with Martin in 1978, remaining with the company until 1981. I left for a year before returning in 1982. I stayed with the company touring nationally and internationally until 1986, when I again left to devise a solo show...



Zippo and Tommy, no Stix... 1979

Moving on

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the challenges associated with defining and limiting the clown, but suggested that, in order to proceed I would have to define, to separate, and create frameworks for the clown, against which I could analyse and critique my own history. In 1986 I made the momentous and difficult decision to leave the safety of Zippo & Co. I did so partly because I wanted to scratch an itch to explore the solo clown performer, and partly because I wanted to challenge and understand my clown practice. I was beginning to create a framework to understand my clowning, and I was intuitively driven to find out more about both my own clown and clowning in general through performance. I have come to realise that I was not alone in my confusion over whether I simply wanted to perform as a clown or whether I was researching into clown through performing. Histories of clowns (for example, Towsen 1976; Hugill 1980) reveal that although the clown may, after

experimentation and practice, come to adopt a persona, which in general remains set throughout his clown life, the details of the persona do develop over time, whether by accident and circumstance, or through 'self-fashioning' (Little 2003: 138-148). In some cases, this may be barely perceived changes to costume and make-up. In other cases, there may be quite radical changes, both physical and/or psychological, and, in addition, there may be a deliberate exploration of the possibilities of the clown, as a challenge to received understandings of the clown. The Swiss clown, Grock (Adrian Wettach), who was famous in both circus and variety throughout Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, was, by his own account and in two autobiographies, continually attempting to challenge standard perceptions of the clown (Grock 1931; Grock 1957). Parallel to this he acknowledges the traditions of the clown, and recognises that any radical challenges to and departures from the standard clown are continually judged against a personal and general perspective of what the clown is and where the clown has come from. As Grock himself writes, 'Your clown just as much as any other artist is the product of tradition' (1931: 226). He then provides a long list of those clowns to whom he feels indebted.

This paradigm of the clown as an artist, who exists in and yet may challenge a tradition, can be considered within a further framework which views the practice from two external perspectives: the spectator, and other clowns. All these perspectives are subsumed within a wider social and political culture. To give an example, Virginia Scott discusses what she terms the *jeux* of the *commedia dell'arte* troupes, who had emigrated to France in the late seventeenth century. She refers to Fiorilli, whose performance of Scaramouche was legendary. Performing the role in *Colombine avocat pour et contre* at the Locatelli-Fiorilli troupe's own theatre, the Hotel de Bourgogne in 1685, Scott writes:

Fiorilli was nearly eighty and played rarely by 1685. His style, which was physical rather than verbal, was not easily adapted to the new comedie italienne in French. The audience came to see Scaramouche with expectations based upon forty-five years of experience of his *jeux*. No one cared that Scaramouche doing the *lazzi* of the sack was not integrated into the structure of the piece. But if Scaramouche had not done several of the anticipated *jeux* the audience would have cared. (Scott 1977: 12)

It is clear from this quotation that Fiorilli comes from a performance tradition that has migrated from one culture, Italy, to another culture, France, and has consequently experimented and developed within that new tradition, in response to the particular social circumstances of the new culture. These include language, and, as Scott discusses in her essay, a defined set of theatre practices, yet the new hybrid retains many important aspects of the former tradition. These please the audience and the knowledgeable insider, although not, as Scott suggests, perhaps, the critic. Consequently, the pressure to insert the sack lazzi into the scenario is both external: the audience wants to see a virtuoso act, and internal: Fiorilli, the performer, wants to show off his virtuosity in the act. This synthesis of different elements of the old and the new which creates a hybrid form is not easy to unpick, and is the result of responding to circumstance, of intuition and of deliberation.

Stephen Knapper examines the antecedents of Scaramouche in his essay *Scaramouche: The Mask and the Millennium* (Knapper 2007: 127-145). He discusses the portrayal of the role by Fiorilli amongst others, and traces various ways in which Scaramouche has been subsequently portrayed. His tracing leads him to focus on how the role was performed by the actor Pete Postlethwaite in Justin Butcher's play *Scaramouche Jones* (2002), which is a '...reincarnation...' of the character (Knapper 2007: 135). In a 90 minute monologue which traces the nomadic and picaresque life of Scaramouche Jones throughout the twentieth century, he realises his clown practice '...by entertaining the children prior to their slaughter by Nazi guards with a parodic comic mime' (2007: 136) in a Nazi concentration camp. Scaramouche Jones works as a gravedigger in the camp, which resonates with the gravediggers in Hamlet, whose clown practice I explore further in Chapter Five. Knapper maintains that in carnivalesque terms 'The movement here is from low to high and thus represents a newer, more spiritual form of carnival that might be termed grotesque idealism' (2007: 138). This term has relevance for an example of student performance practice, which I discuss in Chapter Five, which uses and adapts popular forms to go beyond the traditional association with the clown. Moreover, the above two contextualisations have reassured me that my own confusion, fear, longing and anticipation over my solo attempts in 1986 to create new forms and challenge the forms of clowning I was engaged in has strong precedents as well as being an ongoing process, which go back at least three hundred and five years.

When I reflect upon the implicit research into clown from 1986 until 1999, which involved me in a large number of performances associated with a range of clown practices, including solo and company work, devised and text-based performance, I realise that what supported my practice and reflection on that practice, was a range of professional practical training, which included studying *commedia dell'arte* with Carlo Boso in 1989, and *bouffon* and *clown* at L'École Philippe Gaulier in 1991/1992. In addition, I started to draw upon the literature associated with clowning, including clown autobiographies (Grock 1931 and 1957; Popov 1970), some theoretical texts (Mayer and Richards 1976; Frost and Yarrow 1990), texts by practitioners themselves (Rolfe 1979; Johnstone 1981, Jenkins 1988; Brook 1988 and 1990), and histories of clowning and associated practices, especially *commedia dell'arte* (Duchartre 1966; Towsen 1976; Rolfe 1979; Hugill 1980). These texts and my practice provided a framework for me to engage as a teacher and director of others, both professionals and amateurs, in which I played with and experimented with the discoveries I had made through reading, practice and training. I also started writing about my practice for *The Joey* the magazine of the organisation 'Clowns International'. Finally, an extremely important project for my personal enquiry was *The Funny Bones Project* (1999), which I managed and directed, but in which I did not perform, under the auspices of the organisation Laughtercare. This project focussed on whether clowns in hospital are effective in the healing process, and although I was unaware of this research method at the time, was a practice-based research project. As researcher and producer of the project I brought in a clown trainer, who trained the clowns from Zippo's Circus in hospital clown techniques. I then arranged for them to clown in a number of hospitals when the circus toured, and observed and interviewed the clowns, and health professionals. This project synthesised many of the preliminary conclusions I had drawn throughout this period of my practice, which I then had to document and write up as a formal report for the Arts Council of England, who had funded the project. The general gist of the conclusion was twofold: firstly, that the clowns playfully subverted the institutional practices of the hospital, and secondly, that the growing use and standardisation of the figure of the 'clown doctor' in hospitals (see Peacock 2009: 127-151) and its concomitant institutionalisation can run counter to this vital subversion (Cuming 1999).

Clownesque Devising³

Throughout the period 1986 -1999 a key parallel exploration was in what is now commonly termed ‘devising,’ especially collaborative devising. Devising as method for understanding my practice cannot be underestimated. In 1978 neither the terms ‘collaboration’ nor ‘devising’ were common currency in the performances I was involved in, however it was during the period from 1978-1986, and 1986-1999 that the seeds of a method, which I have slowly developed and used for collaborating and making work, evolved. Collaboration implies a desire to work in a particular way in which a group of people come together to make a performance. Each person wants to share in the creative decisions, which will inform and shape the end result. The methods of performance making and the particular roles of each group member will differ for each group and possibly each project. Collaborative devising is messy, difficult, depressing, inspiring, and joyous, as many devisors have noted (Oddey 1996; Heddon and Milling 2005; Govan *et al* 2009). To illuminate the relationship and tensions between the collaborative and artistic processes, I shall focus on two different methods I employed on two different projects with which I have been involved: firstly with my own company, founded in the mid 1990s, *fishproductions*; and then Platform 4 Theatre Co, a touring theatre company of which I am an associate director. As a caveat I - and, I assume, many practitioners who make their own work - only half understand their own artistic processes. The process is not fixed but a fluid way of working which responds to a much wider sphere of unacknowledged influences, for example, other people, time, space, our own and the group's limitations. We are happy to talk about declared artistic aims and practices, of participation, aesthetics and graspable concepts, but it is at this unspoken and subtle level that collaboration takes place. I can see that my current practice is much more evolved, more sure of its framework than in the late 1980s and this framework allows us to enter uncharted modes of performance, experiment and play with style and genre; to use clown practice in what I consider to be innovative ways.

³ The following section is an expanded version of my article, ‘The Pains and Pleasures of Collaboration’, *Total Theatre Magazine*, 16 (1, Spring 2004), pp. 12-13

The method of *fishproductions*, whose core members are still myself, John Lee and Sally Mann, who collaborate as 'Fuse performance', is simply explained. We go into rehearsal with a starting point, perhaps an idea, (it's good if it's a current obsession) or a short story, or sometimes the wish to make a show. There is very little else. There are the three of us, sometimes a director, sometimes a writer, and some props perhaps. Then we play. We try out ideas, discarding many of them as we go until something, often shadowy and nebulous, emerges. If the conditions are good and we have luck and patience this develops into a performable show. The process is chaotic and time-consuming. We constantly reflect upon it, although it's not an intellectual process. It's messy, like an interesting culture growing in a Petri jar, which eventually becomes recognisable. At any point in the process, sometimes very late, we may abandon our initial ideas and material to go in a completely different direction. For example, in 1994 John Lee and I, with Jane Watson for this project, created a show, *Love Me Tender*, the initial starting point of which was Guy de Maupassant's short story, *The Necklace* (1992). This developed into a piece about lost property. We were a long way into the process when we realised that we no longer wanted to perform it in theatres but we wanted to recreate a lost property office in empty shops and perform it in this space. This created a whole new set of practical, conceptual and technical challenges. Thus our devising method both impacts upon and is developed from the collaborative nature of the company. Yet, as was true with Zippo and Co, we have rarely discussed the relationships between us, perhaps for fear that exposing them to the glare of the light would cause the fragile organism to shrivel and die. It is a sensitive culture, whose process is the result of many years of trial and error, of stops and starts, which, again, mirror where we are in our lives artistically and personally. As we grow older and change, the process grows and changes. Collaboration mirrors our life and frequently a new show grows out of a previous one, or, as was the case in 2006, we revisited the premise of *Love Me Tender*, playing with it through the lens of time and memory, transforming it, using the clown in new, and unknown ways, in a show entitled *Café Lente*. This tracing then may be summed up thus: there are no projects there is only 'The Project'.

Platform 4 collaborates and consequently devises in a much more structured way. For their 2003/4 show, *The Visitation of Mr Collioni*, the company worked with writer Anna Maria

Murphy. She wrote three short stories based on the theme of angels. These came about during a development week in which Cath Church (director), Su Houser (designer), Helen Morley (lighting designer), and Jools Bushell (composer), played with ideas, themes, and images. The actors were not involved at this point and Anna was present for two days. Later she wrote a rough structure with bits of text, based on the stories, which the company used as a starting point for a three-week rehearsal period, culminating in a week's tryout at Salisbury Playhouse in September 2003. Throughout this three-week period I worked with Cath as Co-director. Much of the structure of the piece, as well as some of the sound, design and light were already in place and fixed, although the actors, Colin Carmichael and Kate Alderton, were encouraged to play with the script, create movement text, and rework the dialogue. Anna came in three or four times to rewrite, look at scenes and suggest ways of realising her initial and subsequent ideas and text. Jools was constantly composing, but away from the rehearsal room, developing the sound and then reworking it as rehearsals progressed. After the tryout the show then underwent another development before going on tour in April 2004, with a different actor, Sarah Thom, instead of Kate, plus further rewrites from Anna. I was no longer involved, as the bulk of the devising had been done, and the show now benefited from Cath's single and overall vision. This was an opportunity to collaborate in a completely different way than I had been used to, and was certainly not the method I had worked with. I found it problematic at first until I realised that I wasn't losing my own hard won way, but we were now collaboratively creating a new method, which incorporated my method. The culture in the jar had evolved in a way I could not have foreseen.

Cath Church said to me afterwards, 'I don't know why I do it like this, it's so arduous, why don't I simply commission a writer?' (Church 2003). When pressed she said that the excitement of collaboration lay in everyone creating and shaping the material, that the company were not simply performing an existing script, but that they all owned the finished product. Quite simply, a process which can be frustrating, exhausting and burdensome may produce a show which is far stronger and more immediate, although the question remains as to whether both methods I have discussed place more emphasis on process rather than on product in a culture of professionalism in which the product is privileged.

Devising is a constant negotiation between conscious choices, subsequent decisions about those choices and the accidents of time, place and people. There are many ways of devising and a continuum of collaboration, by which I mean that, since performance is in itself collaborative, there is a continuum which ranges from what can be termed 'unacknowledged collaboration' to 'total collaboration.' The solo street performer who uses the audience as unwitting dramaturg is an example of the former, whilst the Rustaveli Company from Tbilisi, whose production of *Richard III* in 1987, took several years to make, during which everyone in the company jointly discussed every creative decision, is an example of the latter. In the mix of the intentional and the accidental there is a dialectical process, through which the work evolves, and in which through a sort of natural selection of material and contingency, all elements playfully compete. The tension between all these elements is neither static nor linear, nor are these processes in opposition. Instead they continually intertwine, reinforce and enrich each other. Sometimes, all too rarely perhaps, there occurs a happy moment when, as Richie Smith of Desperate Men said to me, during the making of State of Play's show, *Titonic*, in 1999, 'In the end the show makes itself' (Smith 1999).

Lastly

I have used the word 'enmeshment' to attempt to describe a range of practices and a nexus of influences which have shaped and continue to shape my clown practice over the last thirty-two years. These not only include other professional performer collaborators in various assigned roles, who have helped create particular performance, but also teachers, directors and students, as well as audiences who have created my show with me in the moment of performance. In addition there are the writings of others, both critical and creative, which have shaped and changed my ways of working and thinking about my performance practice. Some are acknowledged influences, that is, I have chosen them deliberately, others are unacknowledged, in that I have not sought them out, or even realised that they were shaping my practice, but their almost invisible influence has permeated my practice, changing it minutely, with, eventually, a cumulative and seismic effect. Yet there remains an unresolved difficulty with expressing this, as it suggests that "I" is different from my practice and both are different from the influences. "I" am the subject, and all around is the object. For me, the clown is both

subject and object, whilst at the same time being neither. Clown is a process and an ungraspable practice, although, as I have demonstrated, many critics, writers and practitioners have attempted definitions, which although perspectival, contribute at least to an understanding. I would suggest that, in part, most of the attempts to define clown practices view the clown as a central figure around which the analyses circle. It may be better to look sideways at the edge of the circus ring where the clown is looking at us. Concerning the subject/object, however, there is another method by which clowns communicate:

If the subject is no longer able to speak directly, then at least it should - in accord with a modernism that has not pledged itself to absolute construction - speak through things (*Dinge*), through their alienated and mutilated form (*Gestalt*) (Adorno quoted in Safratie 2006: 15).

My practice has led me to believe that the clown is not able to speak directly about the world, although the clown may speak directly to the world. Through a play and complicity with things and objects the clown may reveal the world. My own practice has been at its best when it has been at its simplest and most direct, yet it is not a directness which plays in the centre, but on the edge. A frequent clown gag is to copy and exaggerate the speech and gestures of other actors on the stage, or in whatever space the clown performs. Thus the gait and selves of the passers-by in Covent Garden are ripe for the clown's play, revealing the passer-by to himself and the spectators. In addition, the gag makes plain the artificiality of theatre and plays with the real and the fake by drawing on the everyday. This sense of the obliqueness of the clown's play, which permits transgression, is threaded through the discussion of the two contrasting periods of my clown practice in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two: THREE'S COMPANY

The Zippo Trio

This chapter traces two periods of my performance practice; the period from 1978-1986, when I worked with Zippo and Co, as a member of a clown trio, and the period from 2001-2010, focusing upon a single project, *The Misguided Tour*, which, I argue, uses and extends the clown trio, yet whose antecedents are discernible in the earlier period. I compare and contrast the ways in which the different practices are applied, focusing in particular upon the complexities of the clown trio, common to both periods, and the dialectical process whereby the practice develops from the relationships between the trio of clowns, creating a new synthesis of practice, which requires further adjustments between the clowns' relationship, which in turn further affects the practice. Implicit throughout this chapter is the major difference that since 2000 my practice has occurred at the same time as I started teaching at The University of Winchester, and consequently has been informed by and informs my teaching and further study, including undertaking this PhD, in the academy. It is important to restate, however, that neither of these projects were specifically framed as research projects, they began with the practice, thus there is a revisioning of my practice as an enquiry in terms of this study, which raises difficult issues of documentation of that practice for me. Whilst the discussion of my earlier practice is an analysis and critique of the nature of the clown trio, and the ways that we engaged with our practice, the analysis of *The Misguided Tour* problematises ways of writing about my own practice, which is still current, although it does not have the benefit of distance, in both time and space, of the earlier project. I also consider the difference between the portrayal of the clown with Zippo and Co, with that of the clown in *The Misguided Tour*, the latter project employing what we designated 'The Disguised Clown' (Lee and Cuming 2006). My focus on the tensions and benefits of working within an academic institution, whilst still pursuing my practice leads me, in the final section of this chapter, to consider an important area for performance: that of ownership of material, including plagiarism, with regard to the practices of the clown. Plagiarism is currently a complex and much debated issue in the academy.

From the current perspective there were two concerns for Zippo & Co in the period 1978-1986 that now seem obvious to me but at the time were hazy and unrealised. The first is that the troupe was in a tradition of clowning, even though we stated that we rejected that tradition, especially the tradition of the circus clown. In a magazine interview with the company in 1982 I stated; ‘Zippo and Co are keen to dis-associate (sic) themselves from circus clowns. “Even top circus clowns get barely ten minutes a show,” explains Richard. “They walk in and fall over while the circus gets ready for the next act. Basically it works on tradition... We try to be like Laurel and Hardy. We have a plot and if there’s a custard pie fight, it has a point to it”’ (Cumming 1982: 9). My assertion not only displays extreme arrogance, but also ignorance of the clown ‘entrée; ‘...the dominant mode of clowning in European circuses’ (Towsen 1976: 225).

Towsen discusses and itemises the clown entrée at some length (1976: 224-255), and states that the entrée is; ‘...a comic interlude some ten to twenty minutes in length performed by a Whiteface clown and an Auguste’ (1976: 224). I would add that it is a self-contained comic routine or sketch, usually employing both verbal and physical comedy, with a narrative arc and a payoff, performed by a troupe of two or more clowns, with assigned roles and status. This permits a great deal of interplay and comic business between the clowns. The entrée is often, although not always, based upon a single premise or theme, which frequently burlesques the skill-based, serious circus acts, and may well follow such an act in the programme of the circus. For example, in *The Acrobats* the clowns announce that they intend to perform an acrobatic routine, which after much confusion, they achieve, although comically. This defuses the tension and seriousness of the ‘real’ act, but also points up the skill of the acrobats. Yet the clowns also reveal their own virtuosity, whilst simultaneously permitting the audience to identify with human foibles: error, stupidity, misunderstanding, inefficiency, but also perseverance and achievement, in contrast to the almost superhuman feats of ‘real’ acrobats. Other entrées may be based upon jobs in the circus, the many variants of *Mops*, culminating in the messy ‘slosh’ routine being a favourite, whereas some have only a tenuous connection with Circus, *The Ghost*, and *The Broken Mirror* being two examples. There are others with a sporting theme, for example, *The Boxers*, a social theme such as *The Restaurant*, in which the clowns attempt to run a restaurant; or a musical theme. An example of the latter is *You Can’t*

Play That Here, in which the clown troupe attempt to play a piece of music, but consistently fail to work together, have the wrong instruments, and, in any case, are not permitted to play, and consequently are repeatedly thrown out of the ring by the ringmaster, and their instruments are confiscated. They have to return by ever more devious means and construct ever more eccentric instruments, for example, a clarinet hidden in a tie. Eventually the clowns overcome all these difficulties, and play a tune together, demonstrating their musical prowess. Entrées are distinct from the solo ‘carpet’ or ‘reprise’ clowning, which cover the changeover between acts, in that the clown troupe has the ring to themselves. Entrées frequently play upon the temporary permission to perform granted to the clowns by the circus, and Townsen considers in *Clowns* (1976: 246 -255) that many entrées are based upon the clown as impostor. The clowns claim that they can do something when it is apparent that they cannot. However there is a double bluff in that generally the clowns reveal their expertise as a finale to the act.

It is true that at that time of the interview quoted above, many British circus managements had dispensed with the long clown entrée, in favour of the shorter ‘run-ins’. It is possibly because the troupes were too expensive, possibly because circus managements perceived them as old-fashioned, and that therefore the public did not want to see them any more, and possibly because the prevalence of TV variety shows, such as *Seaside Special* (1975 -1979), required fast paced, quick sketches. However in some circuses, such as Blackpool Tower when Charlie Cairoli and Co topped the bill from the 1950s to the 1980s, their entrée was the highlight and closing number of the show, employing a large amount of props and effects, and generally lasted at least twenty minutes. When I saw this troupe in 1978 I admired the skill, but felt disappointed; that it was ‘flat’. I now realise that there was no sense that they were trespassers in the ring, but that it was theirs by right. Variants of many clown entrées may be seen in other popular forms, such as pantomime and comedy films, as well as TV sketch shows, a memorable example being Morecambe and Wise’s acclaimed piano number with André Previn: ‘I’m playing all the right notes sunshine, but not necessarily in the right order’ (Morecambe and Wise 1976), a variant on the musical entrée.

Many of the entrées Zippo and Co ‘invented’, such as *Bucket on the Pole* we had seen on TV or we remembered from childhood visits to the circus, and were in fact our own variations

on centuries old entrées, and had become standard entrées of circus clowning. They had become institutions in themselves, with set ways of performing, and specific gags. Zippo and Co did rework these entrées and put them into an hour-long show, which, although not narrative-driven, had an aesthetic, a style, and a thread of character running through it. In addition, we claimed that what set us apart from circus clowns was our more personal and subtle relationship with our audiences, in contrast to what we saw as the unchallenging and complacent Charlie Cairoli and Company, for example, who either ignored their audience, or related to them perfunctorily, without earning the audience's emotional engagement or empathy.

Our second concern was a constant quest, collectively and individually, to find our places in the clown hierarchy in the troupe. I argued in Chapter One that the practice of the clown and the characteristics of a particular clown or troupe of clowns are bound together and expressed in a symbiotic relationship. This was largely unarticulated by us at the time, and revealed during the act of performing. Our hierarchy was, in fact, much closer to the traditional, or, as we came to call it, the 'classical' clown trio. The hierarchy may be played with, inverted, subverted, and is encountered in Circuses throughout the world, but again it is mostly seen in one ring European Circuses. The hierarchy is based around the status and relationships of a trio of clowns, and can be characterised in several ways, although my preferred version is that of the clever leader; the follower who thinks she's clever but isn't; and the fool who knows she is stupid. In circus parlance these are Clown (or Whiteface), Auguste, Droll, although there are a number of other identifiers for the third clown: Zany, Contre-Auguste, Pitre (Rémy 1962). Although we did not openly state this, our rather simplistic perception was that although there were specific variations in the characters and their portrayal by the particular clowns, for most troupes this hierarchy had become rigid, and in itself institutional. Thus Frost and Yarrow's quotation at the beginning of Chapter One is reflective of a particular way of approaching the solo clown, and one to which I can partially respond, but is more concerned with exercises towards becoming a clown, a training. It does not accurately sum up the essence of our actual practice during the period I am discussing; although it is true to say that we employed *le jeu* (Lecoq 2002) of the clown, not only in the devising of our show but in the moment of performance.

I suggest that the basic unit of circus clowning is a trio, and yet there are some who would maintain that it is a duo. Towsen proposes that ‘The clown entrée represents a synthesis of earlier circus clowning techniques, incorporating them under what has proven to be a successful formula for comedy, the now classic opposition of the Auguste and the Whiteface clown’ (1976: 225). However he does say that; ‘When an entrée requires a third character, the role often has been taken by the ringmaster.’ And he further notes; ‘Also common, however, is the formation of a clown trio through the addition of a second Auguste’ (1976: 225). Donald McManus in his book *No Kidding* develops this: ‘The representatives of the cultural norm and its inverse are the two basic clown types of the circus, the White Clown and the Auguste’ (2003:16). It might be asked, what is this ‘cultural norm’ to which he is referring? He extends this notion in the following way: ‘White clown and Auguste do not represent a typology of clown, so much as a theatrical dynamic, reflecting the relationship between any two clowns, their mimetic environment and the audience’ (2003: 17). This relationship underpins much of his analysis of the uses made of clown in Twentieth Century text-based theatre. In his discussion of the tramps in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett 1956) McManus suggests that the tramps fit the relationship, and then maintains that most of Beckett’s recurring duos in his plays fit the above two clown types. He writes that ‘The tendency for Beckett’s characters to come in pairs makes the comparison between them and the basic clown dichotomy more than usually straightforward’ (2003: 77). In the preface to *Clowns et Farceurs* the French clown Pierre Etaix states; ‘D’abord un Clown est un Clown et un Auguste est un Auguste et pourtant un Clown et un Auguste ensemble sont des clowns (Etaix 1982: 15-16)⁴.

Two or Three?

I would theorise, however, that, whilst there are many examples of clown duos, they do not necessarily fit the Whiteface/Auguste model, but frequently the relationship is between Auguste/Droll, the clearest example being that of the film clowns, Laurel and Hardy. Thus

⁴ ‘Firstly, a Clown is a Clown and an Auguste is an Auguste, and yet together a Clown and an Auguste are clowns’. (My translation) The text is broken up with pictures of Pierre Etaix and his partner Annie Fratellini, granddaughter of Paul Fratellini, one of the celebrated Fratellini trio, Albert, Paul and François.

Oliver Hardy is the Auguste; he thinks he is clever, but is as stupid as Stan Laurel, the Droll. In addition, although the hierarchical relationship model of the clown duo may alter, there is frequently, as noted by Towsen above, a third figure, the ringmaster. Even if the ringmaster is not actually present, there is a symbolic presence:

On se souvient qu'ils sont deux: le blanc pointu a paillettes et l'Auguste au nez rouge, dans son vêtement inhabitable. Mais on oublie le troisième: il se tient sur le seuil de la grande porte obscure d'où tout surgit: les éléphants, les tribus de jongleurs ou les escabeaux nickelés. C'est lui qui faut nettoyer, rappelle a la harmonie, ordonne la suite du programme, organisant les métamorphoses. On sait bien qu'il représente le directeur du cirque. On le nomme: Mossieu Loyal. On préfère ne savoir qu'il existe. Qui est-ce? (Fabbri and Sallée 1982: 169) ⁵

For Laurel and Hardy the authority figure may take many guises: a boss, a wife, a policeman but sometimes it may be a car, or in *Swiss Miss* (1938), a gorilla. It is not too fanciful to suggest that in some of their early films such as *Putting Pants on Philip* (1927), Los Angeles and its inhabitants represent the authority figure with which the two clowns come into conflict. In *Waiting for Godot* (1956) Vladimir and Estragon and Pozzo and Lucky are duos, but there is the unseen Godot himself, and his representative A Boy. Godot is the first figure of the trio (On préfère ne savoir qu'il existe. Qui est-ce?)

The circus historian, Tristan Rémy, collected, transcribed and published sixty clown entrées in his book *Entrées Clownesques* (1962). Although no actual circus is stated as the source, these appear to be entrées collected mostly from French circuses. There is a lack of precise information about the collection of the entrées, although there is an introduction in which Rémy discusses the history of the circus and the clown entrée in general terms. It is

5. You remind yourself that there are two of them: the white clown with the pointed hat and the sequins and the Auguste with the red nose and the outsized costume. But you've forgotten that there is a third: he stands just in front of the large shadowy curtain, through which everything enters: the elephants, the juggling troupes or the nickel plated acrobatic ladder. He is the one who looks after the ring, brings harmony, decides the running order of the acts, and the organisation of the changes between acts. You realise that he represents the circus director. He is called 'Mossieu Loyal' (the ringmaster). You'd rather not know he exists. Who is he? (My translation).

clear that Rémy could not have seen all these entrées, although we may suppose that he saw some of them, since most, although not all, are dated, and range from 1850-1954. Rémy's book *Les Clowns* (2002), originally published in 1945, contains a number of photographs from his own collection of the circus clowns he writes about, and he is evidently on familiar terms with many of them. It can be conjectured that other clown troupes whom Rémy knew, narrated other entrées to him. A number of the entrées are the well known, oft-repeated 'classic' entrées I have referred to, and it is impossible to discover the original source. Examples include *Mort et Vivant*, ('Dead and Alive') from 1870; *Le Miroir Brisé* ('The Broken Mirror') from 1950; *Guillame Tell ou La Pomme* ('William Tell or The Apple'), which is undated, although the clowns were a famous troupe in the 1920s and 30s, the three Fratellini, who were very influential upon the work of Copeau in the 1920s; *Les Colleurs D'Affiches* ('The Bill Stickers') from 1935; *La Clarinette* (The Clarinet) (1954); and *La Pièce dans l'Entonnoir* ('The Coin in the Funnel') from 1920. Of the sixty entrées only ten have two performers, and of these ten six employ the Clown-Auguste partnership. The other four employ varying partnerships. Thus *Les Boîtes a Cigares* ('The Cigar Boxes' 1935) has the Ringmaster and 'Le Pitre', which is not easily translated, but suggests 'stooge,' or 'fall guy.' In other words this relationship represents the widest possible in the hierarchy. *Les Clowns dans les Places* ('The Clowns in their Places' 1925), has the Whiteface, Francois Fratellini and M. Loyal, the Ringmaster, that is two high status figures. Likewise *Les Noix Confites* ('Crystallised Walnuts' 1880), has 'Le Clown' and 'Le Régisseur de Piste, both anonymous; and *La Puce* ('The Flea' 1943) has the Auguste and 'Le Paradiste,' again difficult to find an exact equivalent in English, but I would suggest 'mountebank' is the closest translation, although Bernard Sahlins, who translated forty-eight of the entrées as *Clown Scenes* (1997), simply suggests 'Clown.'

Of the other fifty entrées, there are many which do revolve around the Clown-Auguste relationship as the central narrative thrust. The importance of this relationship, 'the double act' as the core of the entrées, should not be underestimated, but M. Loyal does play an important role in setting up situations, entering at propitious times and frequently, but not always, coming on at the end to resolve the chaos that the clowns have often deliberately or inadvertently created. Many entrées use the Whiteface and two Augustes, as Towsen suggests

(1976: 225). Others employ a variety of other performers including ringboys and other circus personnel. Towsen, in discussing the performance of the Fratellinis in circus in 1920s, writes ‘As a trio, the possibilities they discovered in the addition of a second Auguste to the classic clown-auguste opposition gave their entrées richer dramatic contrasts than those of their competitors’ (1976: 235-6). Towsen is suggesting that until that time the Clown-Auguste duo is the norm, although it is clear from the analysis of *Entrées Clownesques* that the relationships between the clowns and their actual practice is not as clear cut as both Towsen and McManus suggest, nor as Zippo and Co perceived it in the 1980s, and is constantly changing and adapting to the circumstance of the characters and of the practical demands of the specific material. Limiting the clown does not fit easily with the practices of the clown.

It is noteworthy that in many of the entrées the Clown and the Auguste are named, whereas frequently, although not always, Monsieur Loyal is not named; he could be any ringmaster. Two suppositions present themselves. The first is concerned with practicalities, in that a troupe of clowns, whether a duo or a trio, would move from circus to circus each season, they would require the services of a ringmaster, and this ringmaster could be any ringmaster. However this is not entirely borne out by the fact that, for example, The Fratellini were associated with Cirque Medrano in Paris for many years. The second supposition is that the Ringmaster is the representative of the institution, a figurehead, and, as well as having a performative function, has a metonymic function: he is the power of the institution, both literally, in that he can hire and fire, cut acts if they are too long, and symbolically, in that he observes everything that occurs, both in the ring and behind the scenes, and his panoptic vision maintains control. Since institutionalised power is anonymous, he too is anonymised. Although the Clown and the Auguste may appear more important since they are named, from the point of view of the institution they are identifiable, and more easily subject to disciplining.

The classical clown trio, whose relationships and hierarchical nature we unconsciously emulated and yet consciously challenged, was therefore the key to our understanding of the particular tropes of our clowning during this time. In reflecting on our work, there was a shared balance between the three of us in the execution of the entrées. For example, in the

opening number *Spanish Guitars*, which was taught to us by former acrobat and vaudevillian turned teacher, Johnny Hutch, Stix⁶, the Whiteface, enters with a flourish and commences to play a piece of classical guitar music. He is interrupted by Zippo, the Auguste, who is late, and in attempting to copy Stix's gestures, puts his foot through the seat of his chair, gets tangled up in his guitar strap, and eventually manages to disentangle himself. Zippo and Stix agree to play a duet, but Zippo's guitar is the wrong way round, so he cannot find the strings. Zippo searches for the strings throughout the entire theatre, creating chaos amongst the audience. This annoys Stix, who orders him back onto the stage. Zippo sits down again, and in doing so turns the guitar the right way round, and finds the strings this time, much to his astonishment. The duo attempt to play again, and briefly succeed, but after a few bars are interrupted by Tommy, the Droll, who walks past with a long pole, from whose end dangles a large fake spider on a string. This causes more upset, and the denouement of the entrée is that Zippo attempts to kill the spider with a blow from his guitar, but only manages to break the guitar into pieces across Stix's back whilst he is determinedly playing on, oblivious. The spider survives triumphant. This is immediately interrupted by Tommy running on, grandly announcing 'acrobatics,' before doing a short display of solo tumbling. Stix then attempts to teach Tommy to stand on his hands, which Tommy misinterprets, by asking Stix to put his hands on the floor. Stix and Tommy are trying to get the handstand right, with Stix becoming increasingly frustrated, when again the duo are interrupted by Zippo, who also wants to learn acrobatics. In attempting to get rid of the umbrella he is carrying, it continually gets attached to the clothing of the other two clowns. The ensuing confusion is brought to a halt with Stix being inadvertently knocked out, so Zippo and Tommy revive him with a foot pump, and sit him down on a chair. This leads into a knockabout acrobatic routine with the chair, which finishes with all three clowns sitting next to each other on the floor, and leads into the finale, a deliberate 'proper' acrobatic tumbling routine, in which the trio work together, before finally exiting in a move called 'the caterpillar'.

⁶ Graham Newton was Stix from 1982 -1985. Previously there had been a number of Stix, including David Sanderson, Ali Omar, Paul Fulton, and Richie Smith, who brought their own individual clown practices to the company. Maybe not all of them were called 'Stix' – ah, memory. Anyway, Graham, who had been a proper actor and had the voice to match, was the first to adopt the classical whiteface motley and role.

As can be seen from this short description of the beginning of the show there is a rhythm and flow to the entrées I have described, with their constant series of interruptions, attempts, failures and temporary success, which is then interrupted by further misunderstanding and confusion, both verbal and physical. In addition each entrée may be read as a series of short ‘lazzi’, reminiscent of the lazzi of the *commedia dell’arte* which build into the entrée, and all the entrées combine into the entire show. Despite the opportunity for play and improvisation, the physicality of the acrobatics and movement is tightly choreographed, and the verbal exchanges have an absolutely precise rhythm and timing. For example, the aforementioned ‘umbrella’ lazzi requires each clown to repeat the phrase, ‘Take hold of the umbrella, keep hold of the umbrella, and don’t let go of the umbrella’ varying the tone in ways appropriate to their status - mounting anger, puzzlement and disbelief, as the umbrella continually becomes attached to each of them, despite their attempts to get rid of it.

The above description parallels many clown entrées, and since the hierarchy is neither necessarily stable nor fixed, the clowns may possess qualities which undercut and subvert their own particular status. So, for example, the third clown may be stupid, but is frequently presented as crazy, hence zany. This hierarchical relationship is not confined to the classical clown trio, but is frequently to be seen at the core of much comedy, both live and TV sitcoms. The characters and the hierarchy tend to have more realistic reasons for their behaviour, which makes them appear more complex and hence real, but the core trio often fits the pattern. This trio may operate in distinctive modes of performance, so *Absolutely Fabulous* (1993-2005), with Daughter, Mother and Mother’s friend displays the pattern in a grotesque form, as does *The League of Gentlemen* (1999-2006), which appears to have a cast of thousands, but is made up of a number of linked sketches which often employ the trio in various forms. In contrast, *Frasier* (1993-2004), with Dad, Frasier and Niles is more aspirational, and plays on the supposed cleverness and snobbery of the two sons, which develops the narrative to place the characters in some symbolic, extreme, and almost Beckettian scenarios, based in a recognisable cultural milieu, in turn employing a recognised comedic trio. For example, in Episode 11 of Series 10, *Door Jam* (2003) Frasier and Niles attempt to join an exclusive club. Once inside they discover, to their horror, that there is a door leading to an even more exclusive part of the club in which they are not allowed. Eventually, by subterfuge, they gain

entry, to find that they are the only patrons and that they only have each other to talk to. Nevertheless they are very pleased at penetrating the inner sanctum, but in a final twist they spot another door, which they assume leads to an even more exclusive part of the club. Desperate to get into it, they force the door open, fall through it, and the door bangs shut behind them. Temporarily blinded by a brilliant white light, they gradually realise that they are in the club's yard amongst the rubbish, rotting food, and dumpsters.

Frasier, with its teams of writers, burnished repartee and complex plotting which resonates with the aspirations of many viewers, is not clown, yet I would argue it draws upon and borrows aspects of clowning. The traffic is two way however. I would suggest that another area which influenced the Zippo troupe in the creation and performance of their shows was contemporary comedy, including the burgeoning live stand up in the early 80s, so-called 'alternative comedy', but also TV and Radio Comedy. On tour we discussed our love of sitcom, especially the British sitcom, which is commonly seen as unaspirational and hence realistic, such as *Hancock* (1956-1963), whose trio of Sid James, Tony Hancock and Kenneth Williams fits the model. Yet although we did borrow references from TV and radio comedy we also wanted to challenge the verbal sketch, the witty repartee, and the apparently mechanistic plotting of the sitcom. We were not alone in this endeavour, as the TV sitcom *The Young Ones* (1982-1984) also did this. However it is noticeable that the central quartet, of this supposedly 'anti-sitcom' does fit the pattern I have described, although, in this case, there are two at the bottom of the hierarchy, one stupid, and one crazy. In retrospect we wanted to have it many ways: be simpler, less verbal and more physical; as well as borrow from TV and Radio comedy whilst disdaining them for what we perceived as their 'inauthenticity'.

We were not alone in our attempt to subvert the circus tradition and the circus clown, whilst being heavily influenced by both the circus entrée and the clown hierarchy. There were other clowns at the time who were challenging the supposed rigidity of the clown hierarchy, and the corresponding narrow compass of the clown entrée. Kenneth Little, in his essay *Pitu's Doubt* (2003: 138-148), writes compellingly about the uncertainties faced by the Whiteface clown, Pitu, in the Swiss Circus Knie during the 1980s. In this essay Little argues that by the 1980s the traditional clown entrée had become extremely restrictive and that the hierarchy of most

circus troupes had become rigid and that far from subverting the institution of the Circus the troupes reflected the hierarchies within the institution. In addition, most troupes did not attempt to play with those hierarchies or challenge the practices of the institution. Little is writing about a professional circus Whiteface steeped in the circus tradition, unlike us, and it is certainly true that the Circus Knie clowns were, and still are, performing entrées such as the aforementioned *Guillame Tell ou La Pomme*, but these may be seen as a homage to the classical entrée. I would further argue that those traditional clown troupes, by reflecting and representing the practices of the institution through parody, do in fact reveal and hence subvert those practices, and it is through the fixed form of the entrée that they achieve this. Little, however, claims that this is not the case. He uses the clown Pitu and his ‘self-fashioning’ as an example of a clown consciously attempting to reflect changing social hierarchies:

It is not that Pitu thought that his life as a Whiteface clown was in vain, but rather that the centre of his world - the one in which he was born and raised, the one in which he could speak the language –was becoming increasingly unfamiliar to him...It is at this point that his tradition, his clown face and entrée style, looks at him and he reads its ambiguity. But it is also at this point that Pitu is decentred... (Little 2003: 146-7)

My reservations about this ‘self-fashioning’ apart, the above quotation, for me, chimes with the struggles that Zippo and Co were going through during the 1980s to develop our clowns and clowning, to reflect the perceived social changes in the early part of that decade, although there are two significant differences. For us this developmental struggle was, as I have said, much more unconscious and reactive than the quotation about Pitu implies; it was felt rather than stated. I would further question how much ‘self-fashioning’ Pitu does in his attempt to reflect a changing, less rigid society, both through the troupe’s entrées, one of which, the classical *Guillame Tell* entrée, Little discusses at length, and through Pitu’s attempts to develop a Whiteface persona away from the traditional authoritarian and rigid Whiteface clown. I would suggest that Pitu is both ‘self-fashioning’ and ‘self-fashioned’ by his context, and, of course, by his collaboration with the other clowns in the troupe, who Little hardly mentions.



The clown trio, Stix (Graham Newton), Zippo (Martin Burton), Tommy (me) in 1985

In Zippo our collaboration, as well as the impact of our relationships and circumstances outside performance, that is, our ‘real’ daily lives, and the influences upon us, of music, film, theatre, and politics in the 1980s, had a vital influence upon the hierarchies and relationships between the characters we played in rehearsal and performance. Like Pitu however, there was a disjunction between our traditional clowning practice, our personal politics, and the venues at which we performed. We were regulars at the politically inspired GLC festivals throughout London, as well as at anti-nuclear rallies, and ‘alternative’ festivals such as Glastonbury, The Hood Fair in Devon, The Elephant Fair in Cornwall, and The Rougham Tree Fair in East Anglia, to name several amongst many. We practised and rehearsed every day, except when we were on tour or on holiday, and so I did not engage with the disjunction although I was gradually becoming aware of it; nor did I perceive that the disjunction between real life and the fictional may be creatively fruitful as well as decentring. The continual sliding between identities of person and persona was then translated into performance. This reflected back in our ‘real’ lives, which then influenced our rehearsals, in a spiral, that was mostly continuous but sometimes broken, by relationship break-ups, financial problems, births, accidents and deaths. In fact, a constant fantasy of mine at that time was that, to protect myself, I had to build a metaphorical wall between myself and Tommy, only for him to metaphorically punch his way through at every available opportunity. Tommy then was the real me. This growing awareness of the disjunction slowly became a preoccupation, and it was a contributing factor in my leaving Zippo and Co in 1986 in order to work as a solo clown.

The creativity of the disjunction did come to fruition much later in 2000, when real life impacted creatively and memorably on the making of *The Family Outing Caravan Holiday*, when one of the performers, Jane Watson, had a baby six weeks prior to this durational, site-specific performance. We had decided to live as a clownesque family for a week in a caravan on a campsite near Romsey, Hampshire, UK. Since everything, including going to the supermarket or for a night out, had to be done in character we reworked the structure and the narrative arc so that both Jane and her baby were able to take part in the performance. Thus her real baby played the part of her fictional baby, and I, as mother, became the baby’s grandmother. This allowed Jane to be able to visit throughout the week from her fictional commune near Basingstoke, having fictionally conceived the baby whilst studying in an

ashram in India. This development greatly added to both the enjoyment and drama of the performance, creating further fruitful opportunities for improvisation. In addition, it brought up complex questions for us about the nature of acting and reality, and the representation of reality. Could Jane's baby be said to be performing and were we improvising in dramatic terms or were we improvising in life, that is, living? This project reaffirmed for me the notion of my practice as a clown as one in which, not only could I use the clown as a navigator for exploring practice, but also that my clown practice brought together the disparate realities of my own life, and created an open-ended synthesis of them, which in turn, through *le jeu* of the clown rather than an acted, realistic character, allowed an enrichment of that practice.

We're all Tourists now, perhaps...⁷

I shall now reflect upon a more recent project employing a clownesque trio, *The Misguided Tour* (2001-2010). I have chosen to write about this project rather than the other projects I have mentioned for the reason that this project has been ongoing over the last ten years, and its antecedents may be traced back to my solo work after Zippo and Co. In addition, whilst this project has its own specific challenges, it also raises some key questions about the ways in



⁷ The following sections until the bottom of p. 60 are a much expanded and developed version of a paper entitled 'We're All Tourists Now Perhaps' I gave at the 2003 American Society for Theatre Research conference on the panel *Writing in the Margins of the Text* in Toronto, 10th – 13th November 2005

which my practice has generally developed over the last thirty-two years, especially with regards to the ‘disguised’ clown (Lee and Cuming 2006) and how that practice now responds to the demands of the institution within which I operate. From when I started teaching at what was then King Alfred’s College, Winchester, *The Misguided Tour* has provided a genealogical thread, which permits me to explore the complexities of my practice, as well as drawing together a number of areas of my practice: solo performance, collaboration, the improvised in a context of set structures, making work which crosses and lies in between disciplines, and the playing with norms and expectations of time, place, memory and audience. I shall address three other important considerations, which resonate with *The Misguided Tour* in particular, and my practice in general. Firstly, there is the problem of documentation and dissemination of a performance event which is site-generic and improvisatory. Secondly, there are the ongoing issues of writing about my practice when I am performing in that practice, especially when that practice is not fixed. Lastly, there is the problem with the ways in which the constant shifts throughout both the making and performance of this piece are both a reflection of and an attempt to challenge my position and roles within the institution of the University.

With regard to defining *The Misguided Tour* as a ‘site-generic’ performance it may be helpful to consider Wilkie who, in her article discussing site-specific performance, *Mapping the Terrain: a survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain* (2002a), states that; ‘The overriding issue of contention arising from the survey turns around the question, ‘Can site-specific performance tour?’ This is a question that might more explicitly be phrased, ‘Does “site-specific” imply “site-exclusive”?’ (2002a: 149). She elucidates this issue with reference to Stephen Hodges’ (a member of performance company ‘Wrights and Sites’) continuum which makes a sharp distinction between the two terms ‘site-specific’ and ‘site-generic’, in that Hodges suggests that site-specific performance uniquely responds to, is inspired by and is designed for, one particular space, whereas site-generic is repeatable in different spaces, but still responds to the particular features of that space. However, Wilkie makes the apposite point that:

This still leaves the question of what to do with those performances that seem to fall somewhere between the ‘site-generic’ and site-specific’ points on the scale. I am referring to

that set of work which is not so much *toured* as *re-located*, that is, re-worked to fit each new site. (2002a: 150)

For the purposes of reflecting generally on *The Misguided Tour* a discussion by Mike Pearson in *Theatre/Archaeology*, in which he considers the accumulation of history and memory around a site, is particularly appropriate:

At site, no such traditions of theatrical usage exist. However, the traces of other usages are apparent occasioning a creative friction between the past and the present and drawing attention to the temporality of place. And within such places, free from the conventions of dramatic exposition, performances may be constituted as a locale of cultural intervention, as a temporary autonomous zone, as both **heterotopia** and **utopia**. (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 111)

I would argue that the above applies to both ‘site-specific’ and ‘site-generic’ performance (as well as archaeology), and that, since ‘the site’ does not have a set of associations that are contained within the institutionalised building that constitutes the theatre, both ‘site-generic’ and ‘site-specific’ performance create exciting possibilities for subversion and transgression of space, and for playing with audience/performer relationships. Whether, with the development of site-based practice, and its accompanying recognition within the academy and by the wider public, this continues to be the case is open to conjecture, and as I consider later, our tour has, to some extent, become an institution in itself, with set performance times, and expectations from both bookers, and audience. At the Larmer Tree Festival in July 2006, for example, we arrived at the appointed time to find a crowd of approximately 250 people already waiting for us. This is confirmed by Wilkie’s supposition in an associated article, in which she suggests that meaning in site-specific performance is created through overlapping negotiation between the performance, the site and the audience (Wilkie 2002b). Yet one of the aims of our tour is to both parody the ‘official’ guided tours and to subvert the performance space itself and the perception of the city as fixed and rigid as discussed by De Certeau in ‘Walking in the City’ (1988: 91-110). So, for example, at the Winchester Hat Fair in July 2006, we discovered a wall in a back alley near the city centre which had been covered in graffiti. During the tour we encouraged the participants to further graffiti the wall with chalk. For some, this was an act of

extreme daring, for others it was permission to play, and, for one woman, to make mischief, as she announced that she had signed her graffiti with the name of her recently divorced ex-husband!

It is worth developing the concepts of ‘heterotopia’ and ‘utopia’, as they have strong resonance for this study. Foucault employs them in his lecture *Of Other Spaces*, in which he writes of ‘utopias’ that, ‘They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces’ (1967: 3). ‘Utopias’ are not employed entirely in opposition to, but are connected with ‘heterotopias’ in the sense that the latter ‘...are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia, in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (1967: 3). Of particular importance are what Foucault calls ‘...heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior (sic) is deviant to the required mean or norm are placed’ (1967: 3). This is particularly appropriate for my analysis of clown practices in *Hamlet* in Chapter Four, as Elsinore itself may be conceived of as a heterotopia with its range of deviant behaviour, and in the Folio version, Hamlet refers to Denmark as ‘...a prison’ (Shakespeare 2006: 2.2: 5, appendix 1: 466). As examples, Foucault gives ‘...rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons...’ (1967: 3-4). Further, Foucault claims that, ‘The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible (1967: 4). He mentions the institution of theatre, in which the fictional heterotopia, Elsinore, is nested. It is apparent that the circus, also, with its conjunction of real effort and performed demonstration, whose seriousness is parodied by the clowns, is also a heterotopia. In the fiction of the circus, the real synthesis of serious and earnest, highly skilled bodily expression, the representation of social hierarchies, threaded through with the transgression of space and identity of the clowns is played out as a metaphor for the institutions of a wider society outside the circus.

Moreover, Foucault notes that, ‘Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable’ (1967: 5). The institutions of the prison and the university, as well as the festival, which are key subjects of this study, clearly

fit this description. However it is more difficult to describe the space of the street, where *The Misguided Tour* takes place, as a heterotopia as it can be claimed that the street is an open space. Yet the fictitious tour, which is a subversion of the 'official' tour, is closed, in that the tourist who takes it is actually enclosed within it, whilst being penetrable from outside, those not on the tour. From the example given above, deviant behaviour, a reversal of the behaviour in the prison, is permitted and even encouraged on *The Misguided Tour*, so perhaps it is a specific heterotopia, which might be called 'subversive deviation'. Likewise *The Village Fete*, discussed in Chapter Six, is a subversion of the festival, a heterotopia within a heterotopia.

Although *The Misguided Tour* has a basic set structure, and the relationships between the three performers and their audience remain approximately the same wherever it is performed, its content is altered according to the particular physical environment in which it is performed. For example, the scenes and improvisations we created for the tour through the City Centre at 'The Festival of Fools' in Belfast, Northern Ireland in May 2005 were very different from the event at 'The Parrett River Festival,' at a former dock in Bridgwater, Somerset, UK in June 2005. At each venue the content of the performance had to be largely re-devised. Although every performance of any live event is unique to the particular time and space, *The Misguided Tour* has presented special difficulties of documentation as no performance could be said to be even broadly representative, despite the company having video and photographic evidence of different performance. This is in contrast to the work with Zippo and Company, which, although it took place in a wide variety of both dedicated and non-dedicated spaces, including theatres, tents, the street, schools, and community centres, was nevertheless designed as a set performance with a particular running order, which was intended to fit into any space, including large scale theatres.

I consider this difficulty of dissemination in the section entitled 'Start making Sense,' wherein I use the brief notes I made of one particular performance, which took place in Bridgwater, Somerset in May 2005, as a devising text to further describe the improvisatory, playful and fluid nature of this piece. It is an attempt to experience the 'tour transposed,' and should be read as a counter-narrative within this chapter, drawing largely upon Norman Denzin's *Interpretive Ethnography* (1997) as a framework, especially the chapter on

‘Performance Texts’ (1997: 90-126). I follow the performance notes with a discussion of whether photographs, notes in a notebook, videos, and our own memories of a unique event, can begin to convey the ‘liveness’ of that event. I suggest that methodologies of practice as research, especially Trimingham’s, ‘hermeneutic-interpretative’ model (2002) can help develop a methodology for both writing about performance and representing performance, which is both critically and creatively satisfying for the reader.

Writing about my own practice when I am in it, as with all ethnographic practices in which the researcher is in the research, presents special difficulties of selectivity, interpretation and objectivity. What material do you select to write about, and why have you selected this material? An approach is that of the qualitative method of ‘participant observation’ often employed in the human and social sciences (Jorgensen 1989; Banister *et al.* 1994)⁸. In this method the researcher purposely places themselves in the group they are studying, and becomes immersed in their activities:

The participant observer is engaged not only in making his or her own observations, but also in ‘tapping into’ this subjective world. Thus participant observation is about engaging in a social scene, experiencing it, and it is this understanding which requires systematic and sustained study. (Banister *et al.* 1994: 41)

However, Banister suggests that the method is problematic in several ways, one being that the research is usually localised and small-scale, although in the context of my practice I see this objection as positive rather than negative. There are other key issues for me around this method. Firstly, with both ‘Covert’ participation, and ‘Overt’ participation, time is required to get know the group, to take notes, to assemble data and material. During a 75-minute performance of *The Misguided Tour*, it is impossible to get to know members of the audience, (although we do conduct a cod feedback session at the end of the performance). Secondly, participant observation is based around studying the practices of a group of people, whereas I

⁸ Actually, my partner who has trained in psychological methods, and who put me onto ‘participant observation’, and I had an argument (24th May 2006) about whether I was simply reflecting on the performances in a rather vague way, or whether there was any ‘real’ research going on in my study, that is, in scientific terms. It’s food for thought, and I think our differences are about disciplines and language (see Luntley 2001). At the time I was rather defensive and upset, but I’m OK now, and we’ve made up, although not resolved the issue.

am analysing and reflecting upon a performance in which I am performing, not observing the performance from the point of view of an audience member, and thirdly, the participant observer has hitherto been a method for the human and social scientist, not the creative practitioner⁹.

With regard to the last point, it may be worth considering the ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ conceptions of practice as advanced by Michael Luntley (2001) and ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ descriptions by Clifford Geertz (1975). In discussing knowledge and its application in disciplines in Higher Education, Luntley considers the conception of ‘thin’ practice as providing ‘a description of practice that is transparent. It is a description of practice that can be readily comprehended by non-practitioners’ (2001: 61). He suggests that teachers are used to thin conception of practice, as it is criteria-based, and frequently employed as an ‘accountability tool.’ (2001: 68). In other words it allows non-specialists to understand a subject, and ‘If you frame the description thinly enough, you can come up with a description of degree level teaching and learning that applies across all disciplines’ (2001: 62). Luntley suggests that the thick description of practice is discipline specific, not only in the knowledge required of that discipline, but also of the ways in which practitioners of that discipline understand and talk about the discipline; ‘The simplest way of putting this point is to say that in addition to knowing what is being said in their discipline, students also need to understand something about the nature of the conversation that makes up the ongoing exchanges of the discipline subject matter’ (2001: 63). It should be noted that throughout his article Luntley refers to more ‘traditional’ subjects in Higher Education, such as Philosophy and History, whereas my concern is with performance, which, as I have noted in Chapter One, is interdisciplinary, does not seem to have a canonical body of knowledge, and also explores and employs creative and embodied knowledge as well as intellectual understanding. Nevertheless Luntley’s conception of ‘thick practice’ is useful for my purpose, as it does allow the

⁹ I find ‘creative practitioner’ a clumsy term, but would hesitate to use the word ‘artist’ here. What is more to the point is that this sentence suggests a binary between the creative practitioner and the social scientist. This is not necessarily the case. My argument is that it is possible to be interdisciplinary - to be both.

performer to be both creative, that is, to take part in the performance, as well as analytical, and reflect upon the performance, using memory and experience as tools for reflection.

Clifford Geertz employs the term ‘thick description,’ which he borrowed from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, as an aid to defining ‘doing ethnography’ (1975: 6). His thesis is that the observation of action, a ‘thin description’, such as the basic notes for the tour in my notebook, are ‘thick’ in their interpretation, open to a wide range of readings, although he counsels caution:

...what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to - is obscured because most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. (1975: 9)

There is, finally, a connection between the differing theories of Geertz and Luntley and the participant observer, since; ‘Qualitative research does not pretend that we can fill the gap between objects and representations once and for all. Rather, because it is an essentially interpretative exercise, it works with the problem - the gap - rather than against it’ (Banister *et al.* 1994: 4). This working with the gap, the clown and the institution, coupled with Luntley’s ‘thick concept’ of practice, and Geertz’s cautionary approach to ‘thick description’, and using Trimingham’s renewed spiral of comprehension reaffirms that *The Misguided Tour* is a thick weave of events, both intentional and unintentional, dependent upon many factors: the performers, the site, the weather conditions, the participants, the secondary audience, people out shopping, which is extremely complex, and unique to each performance. My reflection upon it from the inside and after the event is a subjective, flexible and developing reflection, which permits my creative response alongside my critical response.

So where are we going?

The structure and narrative of *The Misguided Tour* is simple: three clown tour guides take their audience on a walking tour of a Festival site, giving out both true and false information,

whilst at the same time playing out the tensions between the guides, as well as involving the audience-participants in the game. The clown is the element which draws together a disparate and varied ecology of interests of the three performers: our individual and shared interest in performance which takes place in unusual spaces, our individual research interests in visual performance and installation, as well as the play between performer and audience, and the inversion of these roles. The performance is not guerrilla theatre or ‘Gorilla Theatre’ as Christopher Carter Sanderson calls it (2003) in the sense that we arrive unannounced, or invade a space without permission, nor are we overtly and explicitly political, but use the clown to satirise and parody received notions of History, Empire and Englishness. In addition, unlike many other street artists we do not turn up and then build the audience. There have to be set times and a place where the tour commences, and the Festival programme needs to explicitly state that this is a counter-tour. Since we are invited and paid, we are subject to the strictures and expectations of the Festival bookers, and audience, not least that we provide an entertaining and professional show, but also that our comedy, whilst parodying the official walking tour and slyly offering an alternative, real/fake, history, is nevertheless conducted within implicit yet undefined limits of taste, decorum and decency. In other words the clowns are subject to institutional disciplining.

Each performance of *The Misguided Tour* follows a set pattern, although the interventions and improvisations are significantly different for each venue, and depend on a number of factors, including the vagaries of place, audience and our own abilities at the time. In August 2005 at the ‘Water Festival’ in Winchester, a city with a population of 60,000, which has five different official tours every day throughout the summer, we showed the tour party the remains of the Twelfth Century Abbey, claiming that they were the work of Brit artists, Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst. We had observed that empty beer cans and chip packets had been thrown into the site, which, we stated, added to the artwork and inflated the price of the work. At the ‘Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival’ in Belfast in 2006 much play was made of the contrast between the grandeur of the Victorian architecture and the city’s shipbuilding and manufacturing history, and the contemporary plethora of shabby back allies, cheap ‘pound shops’ and fast food restaurants. Belfast provided an opportunity for the clowns to comedically talk about Empire, class and contemporary architecture. We did not satirise

religion or sectarian disputes, although it is significant that in the evening, the drag comedian and singer, *Tina C*, (real name Chris Green) was performing in cabaret. Tina did not hesitate to launch into a very funny and blistering attack on the homophobia of both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland. However Tina was performing in a late night cabaret venue, with an audience who had come especially to see her, and knew, if not the exact content of the material, that satire against religious intolerance would be on the agenda. Even so some people walked out of the act. By contrast we are much more vulnerable in the street, where the audience is not a 'closed' audience, and we have to be acutely sensitive to judge how far we will be permitted to go by our audience in that particular venue at that time.

The clownesque is evident throughout the performance in a number of ways. We use subtle signifiers of the clown in that the tour guide suits we wear are, at second glance, slightly down at heel. The horn rimmed glasses of Clive Fish, Chief Tour Guide, the battered panama hat of Assistant Tour Guide, Reggie Outing, and the smart suit of Donna Matrix, down from Head Office to evaluate the tour's success, combined with our serious but misguided attempts at tour guiding provide us with the shifting hierarchies and comically uneasy relationships of the clown trio I have discussed earlier in this chapter. We also play with and subvert our own hierarchy. For example Clive gives up leading the tour at one point, and allows Reggie to take over as chief guide, although he is obviously unequal to the task. The audience vote that he leads the tour, partly out of empathy for the underdog, but also to see Reggie fail in his endeavours. However in a further twist Reggie proves to have his finger on the pulse of contemporary tour guiding as he illustrates his information with 'Living History,' much to Clive's traditionalist disgust. Reggie's attempts at acting out history are deliberately pathetic, which employs that aspect of the clown, as noted by McManus (2003: 14), in which the clowns step out of the fictional framework to comment upon and reveal the game.

The use of improvisation, discovery and *le jeu* throughout the tour is perhaps the most recognisable clown practice, and is vital to the success of the tour. One measurement of that success is how much the audience joins in the game that we have set up. This requires careful nuancing throughout, using the complicity between the three of us and relies on the necessity for a strong structure should the improvisations fail. In its structure the performance draws

heavily upon *commedia dell'arte*, in its use of set scenes, scenarii and lazzi, in combination with improvisation around character and play with the scene. The notion of pure improvisation within the form can be misleading however. As Dario Fo comments in *The Tricks of the Trade*; 'Everyone knew an enormous range of appropriate dialogues, which obviously varied with the occasion' (1991: 11). The same is true of the tour, in which the set pieces, from which the improvisations develop, create some exciting tensions. In an additional twist, a trope of all performance in the street is that the planned is frequently overturned by the events from the surrounding environment impinging on the performance, including interruptions from people from outside the tour, as well as the participants on the tour. Other uncontrollable events such as the weather influence the play - this is the UK after all. Perhaps the most memorable unforeseen interruption was at the Larmer Tree Festival in 2004, when one of the peacocks, which wander the grounds of this Victorian pleasure garden, flew into our midst and spread its tail and paraded. The only response was to stop the comic business for a few minutes and watch in awe!

These real life interventions create a disjunction and a double play, which further compounds the play between real/unreal. Sometimes audiences have signed up for the tour, and are well into it before they realise much of it is inaccurate, lies and half-truths. Playing with and to two different but intertwined audiences and the relation between these two audiences and the performance event creates a further blurring between roles of actor and audience. There is an audience composed of tourists who are taking the tour. They of course may leave at any point. They effectively become actors with the tour guides, and much of the success of the performance is based upon their willingness to play. Frost and Yarrow's quotation in Chapter One on the clown's relationship with the audience is half correct. It is true that '...he cannot know these realities in advance, for so much of it depends upon us, the audience, that it cannot be preplanned'. Nevertheless the sentence that follows; 'Everything is *new* to the clown' (1990: 69), does not bear scrutiny in the actual performance, where not all is new. The audience-participants take on a dramaturgical role, and one of the challenges for the tour guides is how much to step back and allow the participants to direct the tour from inside it. Frequently, the tour changes and challenges the power relationship between actor and audience, in that ownership of the tour is passed back and forth between audience and

performers, creating carnivalesque moments in the tour, which ‘..belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play’ (Bakhtin 1984: 7). This is further extended in that outside the core audience is what can be termed a ‘secondary’ audience who intermittently see the tour go by, who may see them as another official tour, or who may see the entire tour party subverting ‘normal’ street behaviour, as when we were walking down a crowded pedestrian street in Belfast, Reggie said, ‘This bit’s boring, can we skip it?’ Immediately Clive started enthusiastically skipping and the 50 participants, with little persuading from ourselves, joined hands and followed suit. The secondary audience has a partial view of the tour, yet, their individual reactions to the actual tour impact upon the direction and structure of the tour. The very nature of the tour as performance is that it is not closed or separate from life. It is both discrete, in that participants who have deliberately chosen to take it are in on the secret, and open, in that anyone may chance upon it, and, accidentally or purposely, individually and collectively rewrite its structure and narrative.

At the time of writing, (November 2005-September 2006,) there are a number of performance events in the UK and Europe, which come under the loose heading of ‘performance tour.’ These range from the comic and largely improvised, to tours which may be more closely associated with performance writing and live art, such as Exeter based company, Wrights and Sites’ *Misguide to Anywhere* (2006). At the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2005 there were several performances which employed the guided tour. Three examples are: the comedian Arthur Smith’s anarchic and deliberately chaotic tour down the Royal Mile, generally unannounced, frequently taking place in the early hours of the morning; *The Love Tour* in which an apparently loving couple, took participants around the romantic sites of Edinburgh, whilst revealing the cracks in their relationship; and the tour for three people, in the back of a taxi, in which the driver delivered a monologue about his life and marital problems, whilst from the giant speakers in the back came rap music turned up to the maximum. The transgressive tour has become something of a tradition in contemporary performance practice, and although it is not the purpose of this tracing to unpick the reasons why the ‘performance tour’ is currently popular as a vehicle for performance in the UK, I would briefly suggest that there is a sense of subversion, both literally and metaphorically, of

the institution(s) of the city, and that what unites the above disparate events for both the artist and participant is, as De Certeau discusses in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), the delight in the disjunction of the everyday, planned urban space, so that the space becomes individual to the walker. De Certeau considers that the basic act of walking through a city challenges the rigid and the structured architecture of the city, and that ‘... the walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else’ (1988: 98). There is a difference however between the shortcuts and transformations of the city of De Certeau’s individual walker, and our performance tour, which organises and plans a walk through the city. Our tour apparently conforms to a fixed route, yet simultaneously is playing with that rigidity. In addition the security of the collective tour group gives permission to the individual participants to transgress their norms of behaviour. This is compounded by the individual participant’s real or supposed memory of the site and, for the UK at least, the ‘history’ associated with the site which alternative tours disrupt and throw into question. Thus throughout *The Misguided Tour* a fictive history of the space is presented with the complicity of the participants through comedy, parody and clown, which, in effect, becomes a secret challenge to the received version of history. It is both inclusive and exclusive. It is inclusive in that anyone may join in; it is exclusive in that only those people who have joined in and participate understand the fluid and shifting rules of the game.

Start making sense

As I have previously considered, analysing my own practice over thirty-two years presents great difficulties, especially since the traces for my tracing are not numerous. I shall now interpret and problematise a clownesque text, considering my handwritten notes from my notebook, (reproduced on page 63) relating to the three performances, to convey a ‘thick description’ of *The Misguided Tour* at Bridgwater Dock, Somerset, UK on Sunday 22nd May 2005, for The Parrett River Festival.

Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks suggest that; ‘Rather than pretending to be a final and complete account of things, a closure, the performance document, an equivalent of the dramatic

text, might be in itself equally fragmentary, partial and encouraging of interpretation' (2001:13). Geertz states that:

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript –foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior (1975:10)

My notes, which are in reality thoughts and suggestions taken on a planning visit to the site at Bridgwater the evening before the performances took place, are a fragment towards and of the performance.

We used the notes to structure the performance, but also as an aide-memoire to ourselves to refer back to previous performances, where we had been critical of some of the set pieces and forgotten to include important hooks which draw in the audience. Hence the notes at the beginning, ‘//Names, fingers...thumbs//’ refer to the need to create a sense of relaxation amongst the audience, through introducing ourselves to the audience and the audience to each other and us, so that they will be more inclined join in with the play. However the introductions also serve three other purposes; it allows the audience to know who is in charge for the moment; there is an implied sense of threat and danger, so that the audience know that is not an ordinary tour; it permits us to find out something about our audience. For example, there is frequently a joker who is, in their own estimation, funnier than we are; and after a short while we give up the control of the tour for a brief time. The notes also looked forward to the performances and the suggestions we were making for the performances. They are not a representation of those particular performances, but a creative addition and counterpoint to the performances. They stand outside the actual performance, looking forward to it, and looking back, and are redolent with meaning for ourselves, the three performers. They jog my memory of that performance, and make me smile and nod my head as I read them. Along with the other material remains of that performance, which, as I have mentioned, include a few photos, a video of part of the performance and the cod evaluation sheets of Donna Matrix, they are what are left over from the performance. They are a valuable adjunct to the actual performance, and fulfil several functions. They are part of the archive both of that particular

performance event, but also of the entire project of *The Misguided Tour*. The notes are a metaphor for the performance event, and create a meta-narrative around the performance, which partially reveals that performance. I would also suggest that they are an interesting social document, and their apparent simplicity ('thinness') hides a complexity of approach to our continually developing collaborative devising process. Lastly they can be viewed as a piece of performance writing, distinct from the performance, but complete in itself; as another artefact. What they lack is liveness and completeness. They do not reveal many of the salient features of the performances; that on the day itself it rained almost incessantly, for example. The rain had as strong an influence on the performance event as the site did, and necessitated some radical changes to the planned structure, as well as giving us another element to discover and create fruitful improvisations and play.

Although my analysis of the pre-performance notes, along with other artefacts of the performance, which includes the above descriptions and analyses of *The Misguided Tour* does provide useful insights into the creative process, I suggest that the attempt at representation of the actual live event is, at best, a shadow of that event. My intention through documentation and the writing up of the performance event is to give as complete a representation of the live event as possible. I began my analysis of *The Misguided Tour* by outlining the difficulties of writing up my own practice, but to place the tour within the genealogy of my practice, as well as analysing the relationship between the practice and the aim of this study demands that I develop the methods I have used and the literature I have drawn upon. Clearly Denzin (1997) and his suggestion for the performance text itself to stand in for the results of ethnographic research is helpful for my purposes. Yet I am concerned to find a methodology to develop the writing up for projects like ours, as well as other performance projects which use a large amount of improvisation within the performance. Melissa Trimingham's methodology in *A Methodology for Practice as Research* (2002) could equally apply to the documentation. Her 'hermeneutic-interpretative' model is a circular rather than a linear process. It is 'a spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding' (2002: 56). When applied to the writing, it is both a critical 'about' and a creative 'instead of' (performance).

Sun 22nd

- Statue stands in middle of town — commonwealth

Admiral Blake: — ? Who he??

Boats: —

Pointing !!

- Starting in the middle — we're lost....
- Names / ~~lots~~ finger ... thinks // disclaimer / buddy system (Reggie talks)

Play with many clearly defined scenes...

- Olive waits —
- Reggie sorts. —
- Donna M. observes

(misery)
&
status

→ Olive then talks / Occasionally hands it over to Reggie.

→ Donna M can talk to all.....

• Bridgwater: —

• Street Art: —

Beach

Meditation space.

'I'm terribly sorry ~~about~~ for the inconvenience but there's a festival

• Vista — context

of some sort going on.

Pub is 10% / DH & CR

• Buoy: — Olive reads it off.

• Stones: — K Arthur

Ring !!

Medieval ~~inside~~ Machine.

Put in a decoat ... 3 virgins with a reef.

Exquisite Penhouse Apartments with Coneserge — built to incredibly high specifications

① Young & Lady

② Bunkers House.

③ Anyone with on ASBO.

Boat

→ Shipping ???

Boat — ???

no 2 hour

Currently, many theorists of practice, especially those involved in practice as research, (Melrose 2002; Trimmingham 2002; Clarke 2004) recognise the need to find ways of writing about that practice which includes but is not limited to ‘traditional’ academic modes of writing, feeling that these cannot express the nature of the practice and/or the theory in its entirety. John Freeman’s proposal that ‘heuristic’ research processes (2010: 177-184), in which the researcher engages with their own practice through a process of experimentation and discovery, in which the possibilities and therefore outcomes are not set in stone, and that space for the unexpected, the tangential, and the unforeseen is built into the project, is valid for this project. Freeman writes that:

Heuristic processes offer an embrace of notions of self-discovery. As such these processes are aligned to the kinds of creative research most likely to be employed under discussion in this book, in that the very act of discovery leads the discovering researcher to new points of knowledge and new directions to take. (2010: 178)

Through the process of writing about my practice I have come to realise that the writing itself is heuristic – that it is, in part, a process of discovering my arguments and conclusions as I go along, especially as the body of knowledge concerning the clown is slippery, contested, buried in myth, and not fixed. This seductive notion develops from Trimmingham’s ‘hermeneutic-interpretative’ method in that the practice informs the research which then re-informs the practice, in a continuing interchange. Moreover this is not confined to each single project, although the process is present in each project. The outcomes of each project influence the making of the subsequent project, so the spiral can be envisaged as a spiral encompassing all projects, within which are sub-spirals for each specific project. This overall project should not be seen as teleological or perfectible, as the individual projects may go in different directions, be only loosely connected, and subject to chance and failure. This is not only applicable to the process of devising but is also applicable to the product - the performance in whatever forms it takes. And the writing of this thesis mirrors the devising processes of my practice. Its form is fluid, ever-changing and creative.

This is clearly not new, although what is new are the attempts to find an adequate methodology which allows the writing to be both messy and precise. I, amongst many others,

am attempting to find a mode of reflective writing, traditionally academic yet creative, which contributes to an hermeneutic understanding of the whole. The entire process of creating, performing, documenting and writing up *The Misguided Tour*, of drafting and redrafting has been messy, circling and stalking the question, ending up a long way from my beginning and by including a performance text in the main body of the chapter, the writing becomes a performance practice. The non-linear nature of my thoughts and impulses is as important as the ordering of those thoughts, and a mode of writing should reflect the chaos and messiness of the process of making work as well as respond to the requirements of academic writing. Through *The Misguided Tour* and other projects over the last six years, it has also become clear that whilst much has been done in the area of creative yet critical writing, many of these attempts are using a different mode to write about the practice. As I have discussed earlier, Denzin's 'performance texts' are texts which attempt to encapsulate the findings, rather than being derived from the practice itself. The texts describe rather than inscribe and stand at a distance from the practice. Many of my tracings of the various performances of *The Misguided Tour* are also an attempt to bring to life the variety and richness of those performances, and as a background hum to this tracing are two works implicitly informing this analysis, which continually inspire and educate me, *Vertigo* by W.G. Sebald (2000) and John Berger's *and our faces, my heart, brief as photos* (1984), both of which play with modes of writing, inserting photographs without explanation, and description. I am conscious of two other voices, which have enormously influenced me as I write about the practice: those of my two collaborators on *The Misguided Tour*, John Lee and Sally Mann, who would, I hope, like what I have written but would suggest that I'd got some, but not all of it, right.

Spiralling Up, Down

I now wish to move away from the consideration of ways of writing to discuss a recurrent issue throughout this chapter: ownership of material, and the concomitant issue of plagiarism, which is much debated both within and outside the academy. Within the academy the issues of plagiarism by students and staff is a thorny one, for not only are attempts to uncover it fraught with contradiction, as for example when students claim that they have previously cut and pasted from the Internet without being accused, but attempts to define and assess it,

referencing originality and authorship, are complex. In the University of Winchester, and, as far as I know in all other UK institutions, accusations of plagiarism have been confined to the written work of students, and there has never been a case of plagiarism of performance. Plagiarism of other performance within the academy, whilst complex, is outside the scope of this study; nevertheless it is clear that, for the clown, borrowing, adapting and using other clowns' material as well as written material, such as lazzi, and gags from the media, is extremely common. The borrowing is not only confined to 'classical' circus entrées, (I have seen *Guillame Tell - ou La Pomme* reproduced from the Fratellini version although undated in Rémy (1962) at least four times with different troupes in Circuses throughout Europe in the last ten years), but theatre and street clowns use material borrowed from other clowns as well. For example, originating in street performance, an extremely common number, performed by 'anonymous' and 'famous' clowns alike, such as David Shiner, formerly with Cirque de Soleil, is one in which a trio of audience members are selected and cajoled into acting out a melodramatic love triangle, complete with ridiculous costumes, sound effects and mime.

Not only is the borrowing *de rigueur* but it is assumed that other clowns will borrow good material, altering it for their own particular practices. This subverts institutional notions of ownership, and calls into question the emphasis in contemporary performance on both originality and authenticity. For example, Russian clown duo, KGB clowns, use, as a starting point for a contemporary clown act, the well-known entrée *Dead or Alive*, in which a clown dies, and other clowns attempt to revive him. Each time a part of the clown's body is manipulated, such as a leg, other parts of the body react (*KGB Clowns* 2008). In the popular live forms, there is frequently no one original author who can lay claim to writing the acts, but the acts exist in the oral and embodied realm; that is they are in the public domain for anyone to use, and since the material body of the clown performer in relation to an audience may be said, in both a superficial sense and at the deepest level, to be the act, the question of plagiarism is not even an argument. In addition, it is not the text, within which I include oral material, that is important but how the clown uses and plays with that text. I myself, with clown partner Martin Broad, performed our own take on the aforementioned burlesque melodrama, entitled *The Tragedy of Lysistrata*, at the Utrecht Clown Festival in 1999. The use of audience members meant that we were embarking upon an unknown journey in that, as with

The Misguided Tour, they may decide not to play or play too much. On one occasion we selected a female audience member, who at first resolutely refused to be chosen. The act then became a ten minute number in which we cajoled her out from the audience onto the stage. The actual melodrama which followed was perfunctorily and deliberately played for about a minute.

Further questions around ownership are raised when a writer borrows material, and there are subsequent ramifications of acknowledgement. McManus (2003) discusses at length the use that Beckett has made of the figure of the clown. However in *Entrées Clownesques* Rémy has an entrée dating from 1910, *Charge et décharge!* ('Pick it up. Put it down') (1962: 89-93). The gist of this approximately ten minute routine is that the Clown enters followed by the Auguste, who is laden with an enormous trunk. They are looking for work and, seeing the ringmaster at the side of the ring, approach him. The ringmaster refuses to acknowledge them, but eventually suggests that they are in the way and should leave. The Clown (Léandre) addresses the ringmaster, 'Vous vous trompez Monsieur Loyal. Nous sommes des artistes de passage. C'est à dire nous nous sommes arrêtés entre deux trains' (1962: 91)¹⁰. There follows a series of confusions, during the course of which the Auguste has to continually pick up and put down the trunk, whilst the Clown becomes ever more brusque and cruel towards him. The reason for this is that the ringmaster refuses to allow them to meet the manager, who may offer them work, and repeatedly tells the clowns that he is not there and won't come. Eventually the ringmaster relents, ascertains that the pair are acrobats and agrees to audition them. The entrée ends with an acrobatic display.

Beckett could not have seen this entrée in 1910, and yet the parallels between the first half and *Waiting for Godot* are striking enough to suggest that he had seen a version of it, and used its premise. The two clowns of the entrée have, interestingly, become four in Beckett, but the themes of hopeful searching for someone who will not arrive, whilst knowing that it is futile, and the cruelty yet dependency of the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is

¹⁰ 'You are mistaken, Monsieur. We are strolling players. Or rather we are changing trains'. (My translation) The rhythms of the French text, with the 'vous vous/ nous nous' internal rhyme, are not easily reproduced

anticipated by this entrée. The Beckett Estate is insistent that productions of his works be faithful to Beckett's intentions and that they be performed as written, and Croall (2005) reports that, when Beckett was alive, he was very unhappy with different interpretations of his work, and that many critics have also been critical of interpretations which betrayed the 'spirit' of Beckett. For example, Croall notes that Paul Taylor of *The Independent* felt that in the 1991 West End production, Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson, '...turned the play into a game of complicity with their fans and so destroyed any sense of the characters' isolation' (cited by Croall 2005: 116). Thus there is the irony that the time-honoured hat routine performed by Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* has now become, in the eyes of many audiences, Beckett's, and what was a popular clown and variety routine is part of a 'Masterpiece' (Croall 2005: subtitle). In a further twist the entrées in Rémy's original 1962 edition of *Entrées Clownesques* required no permission to perform them, although Rémy makes the unlikely suggestion in his introduction that one of the reasons the clowns did not write down the entrées was so that they could not be stolen by other clowns¹¹. However the 1997 translation of 48 of them by Sahlins contains the now customary strongly worded caution in the frontispiece that the material is copyright, and that all performance rights are subject to a royalty. Beckett may appropriate the relationships, routines and themes of clowns, and turn them into 'art,' and the original material, reworked adapted and borrowed by numerous clowns is now subject to stringent copyright laws. It appears that from the latter half of the twentieth century curbing the clown has become more underhand and subtle than banishment, whipping or execution. The work of the clown is codified in a book, written about in a PhD thesis, turned into tragic art, not 'just' comedy, and then, finally, the clown has to pay for their own tradition and material.

¹¹ From my own experience with Zippo and Co the entrées are not written, firstly because they are created and performed by the same performers so often that they do not need to be written, secondly because much of the content is improvised. We relied upon what we called 'The List', a notated running order, akin to the notes I have transcribed for *The Misguided Tour*. I have observed that a similar method is often employed by students in their devised performances at the University of Winchester. Eddie Izzard told me at a party in Brixton (1992) that he created his comedy routines walking round Balham at night, improvising into a dictaphone, and never wrote anything down. The concept of 'The List' has also influenced the de-structure of the thesis.

I thus conclude that not only is the deliberate borrowing a counter-narrative to the current assumption that originality in creative practice is a good thing, but the borrowing questions the assumptions that the artist actually makes conscious choices in creating and shaping material. It could be argued that a small company who devise a piece together are borrowing material, styles and modes from other companies, but one aim of collaborative devising is to create a piece which only that company could have made. My own and others' clown practices have been about a refashioning of material and are, as I have stated, a mixture of conscious choice, found material and accident. The overriding principles behind both the actual material of my work, my clowning, as well as the choice of what to write about in this chapter have frequently relied upon the unplanned and arbitrary. I have followed intuition and hunches. Again, this approach runs counter to the practices of the institution which are concerned with the planned, the appropriate, the explicable in the 'reading' of those practices against the sets of criteria, both in terms of the module and the programme, but also in terms of the wider and implicit values and aims of the particular institution.

In Chapter One I noted that sometimes, in the circus, the clown might be banished from the centre of the ring by the ringmaster, only to reappear at the edge of the ring, intent upon watching the serious act, thereby through the clown's simple presence calling the seriousness of the entire enterprise into question. However this may not be to question the enterprise's validity, but to look at it from a different angle, the angle of mockery. The clown is literally both inside and outside, and at the same time neither inside nor outside, but on the edge. This literal, physical edge also translates into a symbolic edge, an attitude, which permeates the clown's relationship with the world out there, beyond the clown. There is not only mockery but also curiosity; the clown wants to know what is going on; a recorder of, and witness to, injustice and hypocrisy. I commented that often the clown addresses the audience with a look, which says 'look at me,' or 'don't look at me' (meaning 'look at me'). The clown's gaze is a summation of the relationship of the clown to that institution, a small but necessary attack, which is not conducted in the open, and speaks to the centre whilst remaining outside the centre. Of course, the ringmaster may offer no clear explanation for curbing the clown, and, in the circus hierarchy, does not have to do so. Simply being a clown may be enough to be curbed. The audience recognise their own situation through the lens of the clown, although

the clown will usually deal with the hopeless situation in a novel, surprising and playful way. The quotation of Frost and Yarrow with which I began, 'Everything is new to the clown' (1990: 69), does therefore ring true for me, in that, in order to effect change, everything has to be new to the clown, and even if the clown has been in the situation many times before, it seems to him and the audience as though it is the first time. Frost and Yarrow are university lecturers writing about their practical experience of clown training alongside students, which they undertook with Lecoq graduate Clive Mendus at University of East Anglia in the 1980s, and it is training that I shall consider in the next chapter. I shall note in passing that when I undertook the renowned teacher Philippe Gaulier's 'stage' on clown in 1992, there were two things I will never forget him saying. The first was, 'No psychology, please,' and... and... unfortunately, I can't remember the other one, but I am sure it was very insightful.

Chapter Three: HOW ON EARTH DO YOU BECOME A CLOWN?

Learnt or taught

I have frequently been interviewed about my clowning, and often one of the standard interview questions has been, ‘How did you become a clown?’ My clownesque response: ‘I forgot to take the necessary precautions.’ This joke generally gets a chuckle and makes good copy and yet, although flippant, at its heart there are serious questions. How on earth does one become a clown? Where do you start? Apart from the bald statement that I was asked by Zippo, Martin Burton, to found a clown company with him after training to be a teacher at King Alfred’s College, Winchester, there is no simple answer. From 1975 I had attended workshops with Attic Theatre Co, directed by Jonathan Kay, to help my Drama work. Each summer we decamped to Brighton to perform shows on the beach, which is where I started stumbling into clowning. From 1978 I was not only a practicing clown but also, to a large extent, learning how to be a clown and performer, as were the other members of the troupe. This reflects a tension in me, and, I suspect, many other would-be clowns, between the notion that I was a born or natural clown, and the always present feeling, that I needed to learn how to be a clown, to ‘find’ my clown through training, reading, reflection, watching.

This chapter considers these tensions and develops several areas which I place under the generic heading of training for the clown. I shall consider the various ways in which my training, both in the actual skills and techniques of the clown and in the making of that practice, has become subject to institutional codes and practices. I shall start with a discussion of traditional circus training, referring back to the article ‘Pitu’s Doubt’ (Little 2003: 138-148). I shall obliquely reference issues which arose throughout my consideration, in Chapter One, of the renewed interest in the figure of the clown in contemporary performance practice over the last thirty years in the UK, and the experimentation with that figure, in which Zippo and Company played a significant part. I noted in Chapter Two that Zippo & Co’s attempt to chart our own path gave us licence to challenge our perceptions of the traditional clown, and to be creative with the supposed rigidity of the practice of the clown. However this ignorance also led us to make dismissive assumptions about the practices of traditional clown troupes,

and to ignore our reliance upon the tradition. I shall discuss our independent training with the veteran acrobat, Johnny Hutch, which led us to reconsider many of our ideas concerning clown practice. This leads into a lengthy analysis of a key issue in clown training, namely the use of the clown's red nose. I analyse its several functions both as a tool for training and as a key signifier of 'clown' in her practice. Finally I consider aspects of the practice of four clowns, Palfi the Laughologist, Avner the Eccentric, Dario Fo, and Vladimir Olshansky, all of whose work has been greatly influential on my solo practice between 1986 and 1999, and my subsequent thinking about that practice and my relationship to the institutions which are the subject of this study. For me each of these 'master clowns' demonstrates a purpose and an intention through their practice. They are each representative of a particular approach to clown, against which I can measure my own clown practice. This continuum of practice runs from Palfi, whose practice demonstrates an anarchic, 'Lord of Misrule', through to the virtuosity of Avner the Eccentric, thence to the explicitly political performance of Dario Fo, and finally to the bleakly Beckettian practice of Vladimir Olshansky. In addition, my analysis of these clowns' various practices starts from consideration of a little investigated yet vital component of clown and actor training, that of learning through watching, which I suggest complements learning through doing and learning through researching.

In 'Pitu's Doubt' (2003) Little discusses Pitu, a particular clown who was brought up in and steeped in the traditional circus. His training, as much traditional circus training still is, was through the circus tradition, as Little acknowledges. In this context, although there may be training sessions in a skill or act, it is still passed on from parent to child and happens almost by osmosis. From 1992-1996 I was Course Director of a touring circus school, The Academy of Circus Arts, under the auspices of Zippo's Circus. This took a maximum of twelve students each year, and employed professional circus artistes to train them. The training was practical and although there was general training in circus arts (acrobatics, juggling, clowning), the curriculum was geared towards the student showing aptitude in a particular circus skill and learning a marketable skill-based circus act. In addition the students studied for an RSA in 'Variety Performance', so they had to follow the validated curriculum. In 1995 and 1996 the aerial trainer was the Romanian, Monika Dimitrascu who had an award-winning cradle act with her husband Gabi. Monika had come from a Circus family, although

Gabi had been a champion diver, who then went on to train at the Romanian State Circus School. Monika and Gabi had been members of the Romanian State Circus but had subsequently toured European Circuses with their act. They had a son, Gabi junior, and every day before and after training the Circus students, Monika would spend time teaching Gabi Junior a hand-balancing act. The parents had decided, when Gabi Junior was two years old, that he would 'make' a hand balancer, and were creating an act for him. It is pertinent to note that the Academy had, therefore, institutionalised training of the students, alongside the traditional family training of Gabi Junior. Both were delivered by Monika, who was subject to the written and unwritten rules of the institution in her training of the students, but was subject to different, but equally strong rules in her training of Gabi. Gabi himself was subject to regular and specific training, but he was also absorbing the codes of behaviour of this particular family, a key element of which was that they were a circus family. Their perception of the ways in which circus should operate, its structuring of performance, the behaviour of the individuals within this structure, its hierarchies and rhythms, all impacted upon the ways in which his parents trained Gabi but also transmitted a spoken and unspoken ethos which constituted the notion of circus. In addition, the codes, both individual and group, of the Academy of Circus Arts' students, who did not come from a circus background impacted upon the Dimitrascus, and, of course, their codes on the students.

This nexus of specific training alongside unacknowledged osmotic training is, I would suggest, a key feature of the training that Pitu underwent, and his self-fashioning must be seen in the context of the traditional circus, and although there were clownesque frames of reference within which we in Zippo placed ourselves, these were orally shared between us, and were derived from pop culture, music, TV and contemporary politics rather than clown traditions or academic research. Until 1984 we were, to all intents and purposes, self-taught in clowning, and the decision to ask the seventy-one year old, former vaudevillian, Johnny Hutch, to train us was a momentous one. It was an admission that we needed and wanted to change the piecemeal and haphazard devising process. It was an admission that, after five years of continual touring, we were now a professional troupe, and needed to demonstrate to

ourselves and the world, professional standards¹². What we did not do at that point was challenge the notion of ‘professionalism’ and ‘standards’. The decision to get ‘proper’ training in clown and tumbling techniques meant that we became slicker and more honed, but, to some extent, lost our improvisatory, subversive and playful edge. We were no longer on the edge looking in but were moving towards the centre. The young boy flipping around on the sand for fun had become serious about his art. Our decision to move towards this supposed greater professionalism was a contributing factor in my leaving the troupe in 1986, as our material, hierarchy and clown persona became crystallised and, for me, fossilised. I felt that our work was a crowd pleaser, but not a crowd exciter; in short, it became safe.

The decision to seek training was not initially the company’s as in 1984 the Arts Council of Great Britain had rejected a funding application from us to create a new show, but had suggested a number of bursaries we might apply for, one of which was for training and development. At The Dublin International Festival of Theatre in 1983, at which we performed, we had gone to a late night cabaret performance, *The People Show Cabaret*, which combined stand up comedy, another reinvented and burgeoning form, with acrobatics, clowning and music. Performed with great skill by the quartet of Mark Long, Emil Wolk, George Khan and Chahine Yavroyan, the cabaret had many clownesque features, being based upon a simple premise, that of attempting to play Glen Miller’s ‘In the Mood’, which was constantly interrupted by arguments within the group, as well as physical and verbal comedy. Following the numerous examples of musical clowning, they eventually achieved this, to the audience’s great relief and applause. Their acrobatics trainer was Johnny Hutch, whose name had cropped up in connection with another burgeoning company of that time, The Kosh. His name seemed to be associated with the areas of contemporary work that we admired; he had a long pedigree, plus he came from the world of popular entertainment and variety, and had the

¹² I am not suggesting that prior to this we were not ‘professional’. The company had toured internationally and we were invited to festivals and theatres throughout the world. Nevertheless, there was an unspoken concern among us that we were self-taught clowns. This was reinforced in informal discussions with the Arts Council of Great Britain, and in the early 1980s I feel that there were increasing moves towards evaluation of performance outcomes, and ‘professionalisation’ from the funding bodies. This was in contrast to the more relaxed 1970s, and doubtless these institutions were responding to increasing notions of accountability and commercialisation under the Thatcher government.

anecdotes to prove it. I can still remember that during a break in training, when he said, ‘Now, boys, the first time I worked with Chaplin/Keaton/ Frank Randle/ Morecambe and Wise/Max Miller.. (insert name),’ we settled down for a long lunch. Anecdotes were a key feature of his training, and Johnny himself traced a personal thread of popular entertainment throughout the Twentieth Century. Not only were we receiving physically gruelling training in acrobatics; not only did Johnny teach us clown routines, and suggest make up and costume, but his anecdotes and stories taught us a theory of clowning, an ethics of clowning and a genealogy of clowning. In his discussion on ‘the storytelling self,’ Denzin refers to ‘...textual transgressions, challenging while reaffirming certain and old truths, and validating meanings embedded in oral texts that inscribe and interpret experience – the recovery of subjugated knowledges’ (1997: 85). Johnny would never have admitted that he was teaching through story, nor that he was involved in ‘the recovery of subjugated knowledges,’ but, in effect, his stories were little parables which placed the popular idiom at the centre, in contrast to us college trained boys, who had been taught to value the serious and the text. The story is, of course, both an ancient and a current teaching methodology, and one that many others and I involved in passing on knowledge, employ from time to time. The story is personal and specific, as in, ‘it happened to me,’ but it may have a wider application beyond the particular time and place where it happened, and it may be embellished and developed to make the point. It is an embodied experience, transposed into another form.

The three of us were standing round the table in the centre of the rehearsal room. The table looked slightly incongruous, polished top shining under the fluorescent lights of the rehearsal studio. Martin banged on it quite hard. ‘Look it’s sprung.’ Graham gave it a thump, I, in turn, followed suit, pressing it with my fingers. Yes it was sprung, warm to the touch and slippery. ‘You’d get up a fair speed across that.’ Martin moved away from the table, we followed him. ‘Right, let’s go.’ He turned to Graham, and pointed at the table with his finger. Graham looked at him for a moment, then turned to me, ‘I need to warm up first. Your turn Rich.’ They both turned towards me and stood there, heads cocked,

waiting. I stared back up at them. There was a pause. 'Let's go,' said Martin again. We did not move. In the pause, we heard the patter of running feet behind us. We all turned round together. Johnny ran up to the table, stretched out his arms, slid across it, a blur off the end, went into a forward roll on the mat, and came neatly to standing. He was a little breathless. He casually adjusted the bow tie that he always wore, and picked up his brown trilby hat. 'Well boys,' he said, 'Let's go, best not wait till you're an old age pensioner like me.' The three of us looked at each other again, shrugged our shoulders, and lined up, to start practising the slides and rolls of the 'table routine'.

Transformations

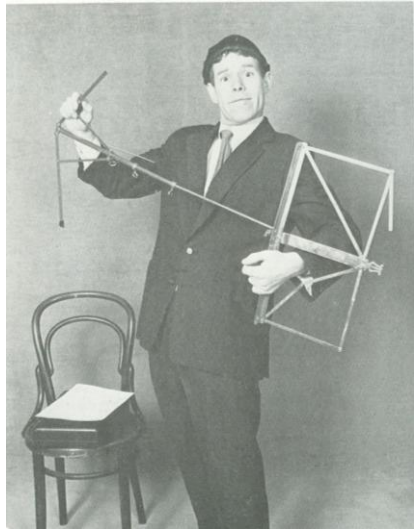
As well as a transmitter of acts, and a teacher of the ethics of performance, Johnny Hutch was key for us in transforming our costume and makeup. It was he who suggested that we try working with the red nose and adapting our motley with it. Since we had explicitly rejected the hierarchy and entrées of the traditional trio, we were suspicious of any attempt to change our look, reasoning that there was a synergy between all aspects of our clowning, and that to change one aspect would affect all the others. We were also conscious that we were a troupe, not just a collection of individuals and that we would have to think carefully about which of us would wear the nose and why. After practical experimentation, discussion and some resistance we did move closer to adopting the motley and relationships of the classical clown trio in that Graham (Stix) became the Whiteface, Martin (Zippo) became the Auguste with red nose, and I (Tommy) was the Droll. This, in turn, affected the content and material of our routines, which did appear to become more traditional. In actual fact I could never make up my mind whether to wear the nose or not. Sometimes I did wear it and sometimes not, depending on the context of the show. A tour of schools would mean I experimented much more and played with the nose, whereas in theatre performances and on TV, when in 1984 and 1985, we were in two series of the BBC children's show *Hartbeat*, I would wear a Whiteface, based upon the Pierrot clown, reminiscent of the mime clown.

Throughout this process we discussed the merits and demerits of wearing the red nose amongst ourselves from three perspectives: semiotic: what it signified about our clowning; aesthetic: the actual appearance of the troupe; and, to a lesser extent, the implications of the red nose in a wider context, that is, what we ourselves were saying about the clown and where we placed ourselves in performance by wearing it. In addition, there was another aspect to the red nose, which I was only dimly aware of at the time of our experiments, but now see as key to my future direction as an artist and teacher. The more I experienced playing with the nose, both in performance, and in training, the more I realised the different potentialities of this and other masks. This ‘masked play’ as Philippe Gaulier calls it (1992a), with its surrounding metaphysical considerations of the masks we wear, has subsequently had a profound effect upon my life and thinking, and opened up for me a continuing fascination with mask and mask work. Although the red nose has a specific relationship with the clown and has a physical and metaphorical connection with the figure of the clown, there are a number of ways in which it functions which are common to all masks.¹³

My interrogation of the functions runs the risk of suggesting that the red nose is a fixed entity, a thing, whereas it is a performative and fluid mode of becoming, its meaning constantly slipping out of one’s grasp. Separating out the functions further suggests that the mask is an entity by itself, when, in order for it to be performed and to perform, it must be attached to the human animal, generally, although not always, the face of that animal. For example, the humps and lumps that the ‘Bouffon’ (Gaulier 1992a) wears on the body, mask the body and by extension reveal the body as a mask. Furthermore, the importance of the red nose in training, especially in, ‘... the exploration of one’s own clown, the one who has grown up within us and which society does not allow us to express’ (Lecoq 1973: 153), has been widely acknowledged. Indeed masks are frequently used as a tool for training the actor and might not be used in a theatrical performance. In some cases a particular type of mask is not intended to be used in performance, but as a resource for actor training. An example is Lecoq’s ‘neutral mask,’ which he developed from Copeau’s ‘Noble Mask,’ about which there

¹³ The following sections until p.89 are a development and expansion of a performative paper I gave entitled ‘The Functions of the Clown’s Red Nose’ at the *Clowns, Fools and Pícaros –Popular Forms in Literature, Drama and Film* conference, 4th- 6th September 2003, Queen’s University, Belfast

is much controversy (Lecoq 2002; Eldredge and Huston 2002). As a teacher of clown myself, I endorse Lecoq and Gaulier's method, recognising both the benefits and the institutionalised practice, and insist upon students wearing the red nose when they play. When and if students decide that they wish to use the clown in their performance outcomes, I do not insist, recognising not only my own rejection of it in performance after I left Zippo and Co, but also because not wearing the nose permits a wider range of characterisation and more psychologically realistic play by the clown.



Solo clown, un-rednosed, 1988

A frequent misconception by students and critics about much of the training in clown is that it is intended as a training to become a professional clown. Yet both Lecoq and Gaulier see training in clown as an introduction to a particular and important 'dramatic territory', or as Lecoq calls it 'limite' (2002). The clown training develops specific aspects of actor training: openness, vulnerability and the paradoxical success of failure (2002). This should be placed alongside a number of other body based practices, including Pantomime, Bouffon; Commedia dell'arte; Melodrama; Greek Tragedy for Lecoq (2006), and, in addition, Shakespeare and Chekhov for Gaulier (1992a). These particular dramatic territories come after a training in other areas of mask, including 'neutral', 'character', and 'larval', improvisation or 'le jeu', and alongside movement, acrobatics and voice. Clown training should thus be seen in the wider context of actor training, which is informed by a number of traditions of bodily actor training

in Europe in the twentieth century, especially Meyerhold, Copeau, Decroux, Lecoq and Gaulier, but also Artaud and Brecht. These teachers themselves both consciously and unconsciously, draw upon other cultural contexts and performance forms to develop their teaching, as, for example, does Lecoq, who writes, ‘Through Jean Dasté I discovered masked performance and Japanese Noh Theatre’ (2002: 5).

An analysis of the functions of the red nose in performance is therefore, despite the above admonitions and clarifications, helpful for me in the recognition and reconstruction of my clown practice. It looks back towards my training with Johnny Hutch, who was not interested in the personal search for the clown, as well as clarifying my teaching of clown. The analysis is a reflection of that practice, a performance of theory, in which, in the words of Philippe Gaulier, ‘Monsieur Flop’ may enter the room. I figuratively don my red nose as I write, you don yours, so we may speak to each other. If there are mistakes, misconceptions, gaps, let us look for the scapegoat to blame.. ah, that clown here, there, now who thrives on the foolish text. Regard the pleasure of this clown, the play of his nose. Imagine for yourself the weary French accent of Philippe Gaulier when he said to me, when I was having a ‘big flop’ on his clown ‘stage’; ‘Richard, you have forgotten the pleasure of the clown. You have a little light bulb in front of your face, it is not lit up. Maybe accountancy is a good profession for you’ (Gaulier 1992b). Imagine the pleasure the other students felt at this, the fear that it might be their turn next and that at some point, possibly quite soon, they would undoubtedly flop.

The discovery of the personal clown through the red nose begins with the body in the space, with said red nose, the smallest mask, attached to the face, looking out at the audience, who look back at the clown, drawn to the red nose as a focussing point for the traffic between performer and audience; a phenomenological exploration by the clown but a viewed experience for the audience. I reflect that the performance is not an end but another stage in the process that encompasses training, rehearsal, showing; training, rehearsal, showing, ad infinitum. I try to avoid artificially separating this process into these elements, (although by noting them perhaps I already have). Yet, while the clown looks at us and we wait, we can pause to identify several interconnected functions of the nose: basic signification, permissive,

embodiment, transformative, deconstructive. There is no continuum or paradigm, nor are particular functions privileged. Several functions may and usually do operate simultaneously. The nose possesses certain features in common with other masks, yet it is a specific mask with a practical purpose, not solely decorative. The red nose will frequently be used in conjunction with other signifiers: costume, props, speech, and a movement vocabulary, all of which constitute for us, the audience, and for her, the wearer, 'clown.'

- As basic signification:

I suggest that, for the audience, the red nose is the clearest signifier of the clown, and it possesses the dual qualities of being both reassuring and threatening. There are other signifiers of 'clown,' and it is usual for the performer to signify 'clown' in some way. For example, the Lecoq trained company, Complicite, in their early shows, such as *A Minute too Late*, which they first performed in 1983, and subsequently revised several times throughout their history, most recently at the National Theatre in 2005, and with the three original actors, Simon McBurney, Josef Houben and Marcello Magni, used the clown, but dispensed with the red nose. However, they adopted comedy glasses as the signifier. Significantly, when they took their performance outside into the street, they added the red nose to the other signifiers. Their street performances tended to be improvisations with the public. Thus they were reacting to the space, as well as performing with that space and the situations in which they found themselves, so it is likely that, without the comforting signifiers of theatre, including the clear psychological and physical separation between audience and performer, they could easily be mistaken for members of the public, however eccentric. The addition of the red nose further marked the transgression. I have discussed the clownesque signifiers in *The Misguided Tour*, but in a further example, in preparation for *Love Me Tender* (1994), Jane Watson and I, who played clownesque characters but without the red nose, took the tube from Brixton to Victoria to enquire about a fictitious lost umbrella. Although I was wearing a too tight suit, with my hair plastered to my head with brylcreem, sandals with odd socks and carried a battered umbrella, and even though it was a sunny day, Jane wore a loud check coat and zip up bootees, with bright red lipstick and a transparent plastic rain hat, no one gave us a second glance. We did not look out of place amongst the other eccentrically dressed passengers.

The red nose of the clown is a mask with which the audience are familiar and which they recognise. Phenomenologically the nose is clown, unlike, for example, *commedia* masks, which require quite specialised and extensive knowledge of the *commedia dell'arte* characters, scenarii, and history for the spectator to read the mask. Thus the character of Arleccino has to display a specific gestural language, has a costume which signifies his status and genealogy, and his mask is adapted for those movements, costume and role (Duchartre 1966; Rudlin 1994). Even with other more recognised masks, such as 'character' and 'larval' (Lecoq 2002), there is no immediate recognition by an audience, and the masked actor has to move appropriately and perform actions for an audience to understand them. In other words, as Frost and Yarrow note (1990), although it is extremely difficult in practice, what is required to say 'clown' is simply the actor putting on the nose and standing in front of audience. The doing comes later, which is where the success or the failure of the clown is earned. In a final year BA Drama Studies project I supervised in 2003, *Slipping Through the Unconscious*, two members of the company put on or took off the nose where their text demanded it. The audience immediately recognised that they were now clowns, consequently this simple yet effective Brechtian device enabled both the actors to move between psychological realism and the stylised in their performance, as well as convey that to their audience. With this basic signification there is what I term a negative space with this function, in that other recognised signifiers of the clown, big boots, baggy trousers, multi-coloured hat may be used, but, for an audience, wearing these without the nose, the clown appears incomplete.

- As permissive:

Although the simple presence of the red nose will immediately denote clown, the relationship between clown and spectator needs to be developed. A clown must reveal that he is a 'real' clown through performance. For the street performances of Complicite the audience gives the clowns permission to transgress the implicit, normative and shared codes of the relationship between them. Frequently, the audience for the clown is a popular one, in the sense that there is a wide spread of age and class, many of whom are not traditional theatregoers. Often the performance space is not a dedicated or privileged performance space, so the audience expects the clown to transgress in some way, whether it is by asking members of the audience to participate, or by invading the space of the audience, or by rude behaviour, such as the various

entrées around spitting water (Rémy 1962). The clown thus occupies a liminal space in that through his particular qualities he stands both inside and outside the context and institutions within which he operates, allowing him to play with social norms. This space takes several forms: between audience and actor, between the set and the improvised, and between the clown as clown and the actor as clown. An example of liminality is seen in the performances of the American clown Palfi, (who actually calls himself a ‘Laughologist’ in preference to a clown), as he entered to begin his performance without costume or makeup, pushing an ancient, battered pram (1987). He claims his space and announces his performance. This first performance of the day consists of him, with the help of his audience, putting on his costume and minimal makeup. This act, which may last up to half an hour, stamps firmly on the notion of a story or narrative, whilst simultaneously subverting the clown itself. In essence, Palfi performs a clown show which is about becoming. Until the very end there is apparently no clown, as it is only in the final moments of the show that he places the nose on his face and reveals the clown, at which point he bows and leaves. This finale is a climatic moment, albeit a small one, and in that placing of the fake nose on the real nose, which makes Palfi the real clown, we see the nose, as Fo says of mask in an interview in 1977: ‘So what is this mask? The mask is the dialectical synthesis of conflicts...’ (Fo 2003a: 242). Through it the audience recognises the clown, and identifies with the clown in themselves.

In fact the transgressions I have indicated above are threaded throughout Palfi’s act. He asks the audience to help him dress; he takes off his normal clothes in public; he frequently crosses into the audience’s space and ignores the created performance space, and much is left to chance, including elements beyond his control, such as when, during a performance at the Belfast Festival of Fools in 2005, the wind blew his towel away as he changed. For Palfi the performance is open ended, empowering the audience by leaving them with the question of when does the clown appear, after having presented them with the possibility of there being no clown, an unclowning. My answer is that he is both always the clown and only at the end when he dons the nose. We give Palfi permission to clown, even when he does not reveal the clown, provided there is the payoff of the red nose. However, although this is a denouement of a sort, he undercuts it by announcing, ‘My real show is at 2.30.’ In fact, what happens at 2.30 is that Palfi returns, and creates a clown orchestra from members of his audience, who

have to return later to accompany him for his final performance, which consists of him blowing up and releasing a giant balloon.

In 1987 Kiev based Clown Company Mimirichy performed at the International Clown Festival at Bognor Regis, West Sussex. They performed a variant of the musical entrée, which I have considered in Chapter Two. Frequently the instruments are eccentric or home made, such as the one-stringed phonofiddle or inappropriate for the performer, such as when the smallest clown plays the sousaphone, by which he is completely engulfed and which he can hardly carry. Frequently the musical instruments are tricked out to fall apart or even explode, as is the case with the Italian clowns The Rastelli (1982), in which the bulb of the large G flat horn explodes, shoots across the ring and lands neatly on another clown's head. Zippo & Co used to perform an acrobatic entrée, tumbling over and on a piano. As we were taking our bows at the end it exploded, showering us with the keys, at which point we all put up umbrellas. In the case of Mimirichy their instruments were inner tubes of various sizes ranging from a giant tractor tyre to a child's tricycle tyre. The Whiteface clown had the smallest tube, the Droll, with the lowest status, bounced on to the stage in the tractor tyre. This caused much envy amongst the other clowns, who in their various ways attempted to wrongfoot the Droll. In addition, whenever the clowns stepped out of line the Whiteface would beat them, send them off, and allow them to return on condition that they conformed to his rules. This permitted much clownesque quarrelling, forging of alliance, which, without being explicitly political, was a comic yet complex illustration of power relationships in general and the situation in the former USSR in particular. Although, no specific instances of repression were indicated by the entrée, the supposedly harmless figure of the clown was here used to critique a corrupt oligarchy. Although it may be questioned to what extent this had an effect in the political arena, and is a question about the effectiveness of the clown to be explored at length later in this project, Mimirichy were a conduit for a collective if unvoiced challenge to an oppressive regime.

- As embodiment:

In their chapter in *Improvisation and Drama* on Lecoq's training of 'the search for one's own clown,' Frost and Yarrow discuss how the semiotics of the nose permits the clown to 'be'

before allowing her to ‘do’ (Frost and Yarrow 1990: 67-68). They also state that ‘... the red nose is only part of our laughter.’ (1990: 68.) Yet when the actor starts from the nose, it creates a movement vocabulary, which stylises the movement and develops into a specific and individual way of using the entire body. For example, a tall person will emphasise their height by starting with the nose looking down. This simple action allows the clown to become the body, which happens to be their body, in its distinctiveness. An embodied character emerges, which can then be played with and developed through simple instructions. In my own teaching I tell students that the clown is ‘nosey,’ that they must investigate what they see, as if for the first time, allowing the nose to lead. This permits a rhythm, personal to the actor, which in the combination of rhythms, emotions and statuses allows the troupe to interact and play, and extends the simplest movement by clowns so that they become extremely expressive and comic. This may sound self-evident but, although the starting point is extremely simple, (‘taking the red nose for a walk’, as I call it), the permutations and developments for the clown it permits can become extremely complex. It also requires an enormous sensitivity from the teacher towards each actor, and a fine judgement in pushing the actor far enough but not too far, to frighten the participants. Johnstone discusses this at length in his chapter ‘Masks and Trance’ (1981: 143-206) in *Impro*, and relates the steps he takes to help students who are overwhelmed by the mask. These same precautions apply in the case of the clown’s red nose. When the actors really play with their noses, and the teacher is working well some delightful sequences can develop. In directing the Foolhardy Folk Circus in 1999, as an improvisation we began playing with the entrance of the clowns, the looks to the audience, and then each other, the waiting. This was started by the movement of the nose, which led into one of them raising a hand, which another copied. This developed into an extremely intricate and complex entrée based round hand shakes, mistakes, and shyness. It helped that I was working with a company who had been together for fifteen years and were expert, professional clowns.

The red nose is ‘...only part of our laughter’, but an entire piece can be created from the red nose. As I have noted, one of the features of the red nose of the clown is that it does not have a particular set of prescribed bodily movements associated with it, unlike *commedia dell’arte*, in which the particular characters move in different ways, and for whom the precise movement and posture is indicative of their status, character traits, and relationships between

them. Since the prescribed movements have been reconstructed from historical documents, there has been, and still is, controversy over the authenticity and accuracy of the movements and different teachers will teach specific movements for each of the characters (see Rudlin 1994). In addition, because of their form, the particular *commedia dell'arte* masks cause the body of the actor to operate them in a specific way. Arlecchino has a flat mask and the actor can only perform facing the audience, or the mask does not work, whereas Capitano, with his extended phallic mask, can play in profile as well as face on. This creates an interesting contrast between the dictates of the prescribed character movements and the movements of the masked head, which can appear to separate mind and body in many of the *commedia* characters. So for example, Arlecchino, who thinks slowly but moves quickly, and whose body frequently goes in the opposite direction to his head, conveys the impression of extreme confusion. This is translated into his actions, and contributes to the drivers of the plot, for example, Arlecchino's confusion over which way he needs to go, develops from his movements and posture – see, for example the illustrations of Arlecchino in Duchartre's *The Italian Comedy* (1966: 123-160).

Although movement is not prescribed for the clown, many clowns have a distinctive walk which they adopt, and which is based upon their own walk. As I often state in teaching clown, 'The Clown is you moved sideways' (Cuming: 1986-2011: many, many times), and a basic clown exercise is concerned with finding a walk, exaggerating and using one's own habitual walk. Examples of clowns with individual yet stylised walks and movement are the film clowns, Jacques Tati, Chaplin and Groucho Marx. Jacques Lecoq, in his lecture, *Tout Bouge* (1988), demonstrated Tati's habitual way of going slightly off balance backwards before walking forwards, and thus the essential Tati character is seen through the walk. The audience knows that in any situation Tati will go backwards to go forwards. He exaggerates this movement to great comic effect in *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* (1952) on at least two occasions, when, to give a single example, invited to drink a toast while wearing a heavy knapsack on his back, he flings his head back and is immediately carried out through the door and tumbles back down the hilly path, up which he has just laboriously climbed.

In my own observation of teaching clown, students will invent a clown walk for

themselves, which they then readjust with the addition of the red nose on the face. Students often claim that the nose wants them to do one thing, whilst their body wants to do another. This tension reveals the clown, and is a key feature of the clown. In his discussion of Albert Fratellini, Towsen states; 'But it was Albert's appearance, which he himself described as being that of a hairy old ape, that was most shocking. By exaggerating certain characteristics often associated with the Auguste, he projected a far more monstrous image' (1976: 237). Towsen does not note however that at the same time Albert wore a gigantic smile. Many mask teachers, although not all, argue strongly against the prescriptive use of a specific set of movements and posture with a particular mask, (for example, Johnstone 1981:143-206), yet he nevertheless states that; 'Masks themselves impose certain ways of behaving' (1981: 158). This is in accordance with the statements of many mask actors who report that the fruitful development of working in the mask is because it imposes a set of movements, which, paradoxically, liberates the actor's movement and behaviour in the mask. The red nose of the clown is no exception, in that whatever the clown does, the nose provides a counterbalance to the actions of the clown.

- As transformative:

The mask is not only functional but possesses an aesthetic quality, to which audiences respond. They will perceive a mask as an object, to be admired or disliked on its visual quality. The look of the mask may say a great deal about the character, prior to the actor doing anything. I have discussed the red nose as signifying clown, but other types of mask may demonstrate certain characteristics simply from their look. Writing about his training in traditional 'Topeng' masks in Bali, Mitch Mitchelson discusses the way in which the high caste characters are contrasted with the grotesque comic masks of the rustic characters (Mitchelson 2002). It is clear from this article that the masks 'evoke' the characters, and yet this must be combined with a precise gestural language, which can only be read by the initiated: 'Western characters would be challenged by the demands of the form: its precision, rhythm, energy and use of Keras and Manis (hard and soft gesture)' (2002: 12). However, to compare the Balinese Topeng masks with the clown's red nose, it is clear that there is a significant difference in that the clown nose is not realistic in any way, although many clowns might argue that the red nose is the exaggeration of the red nose of the drunkard. I would

argue that this historical connection has been severed for a contemporary audience. The clown is recognised through the nose by both historical and symbolic association. In other words, without the embodiment by the actor, the mask may be admired but is a dead object, which will not suggest its narrative possibilities, and neither is there any indication of what both Lecoq and Gaulier call the ‘contremasque’, which I define as a physical subtext, for a particular mask. The ‘contremasque’ is suggested through the performance and occasionally revealed. This was beautifully illustrated by Lecoq during his performance lecture, *Tout Bouge* (1988) in which the character mask of the ‘intellectual’ becomes, with a slight tilt of the head, that of the ‘cretin.’ Peter Brook in *The Shifting Point* goes further, emphasising that unless the functional and the aesthetic combine the use of the mask in performance is, as he says, ‘horrible.’ He points out that if masks are purely decorative, they will fail in theatrical terms. Whilst this is perhaps overemphatic, since it is possible to imagine a performance in which masks are deliberately only used for decoration, which could succeed in theatrical terms, nevertheless the stress on the specific use of the mask for a specific purpose is salutary. Thus, referring specifically to his production of *Conference of the Birds*, he suggests that the reason for using masks in a performance has to be a necessary one, not simply arbitrary (1988: 217-227).

The transformative power of the mask has been well documented by theatre practitioners and scholars (Rolfe 1979; Johnstone 1981; Brook 1988; Frost and Yarrow 1990; Leabhart 1994). Yvette Hutchison, in her article, ‘Masks Today: Mediators of a Complex Reality’ (1994), discusses in depth the steps she takes to develop this transformation in her practical work with student actors. Whilst I would hesitate to go as far as some of the above, who consider the transformation in shamanistic terms, there is no doubt that masks effect a transformation of the normal, daily behaviour of the wearer. The transformation rarely happens immediately, nor does it happen every time the mask is put on. Many practitioner researchers have attempted to discover how actors of mask attempt this transformation. Leabhart, for example, relates the steps in which Copeau required his actors to put on the mask prior to using them (Leabhart 1995: 82-113). Copeau’s method proposes a particular ritual in which the mask and the actor meet. It is also interesting to note that Johnstone calls his chapter on mask in *Impro* (1981: 143- 206) ‘Masks and Trance,’ and spends some time in

discussing ways in which he prepares both workshop space and the actors so that they may leave their daily life behind in order to allow the transformation to occur.

In my early days of teaching clown and without knowledge of the ritualistic Copeau method of putting on the mask, I would instruct students and participants that they had to put on the red nose of the clown in a series of steps and precise movements. They also had to do this with their back turned away from other participants, as privately as possible. They then would pause and I would suggest that they must 'feel the mask within you,' before turning round to attempt to play. My first exercise was for the students to explore the room, letting the nose lead, and play with the objects within the room. I would be on the alert for those students whom the red nose completely took over, which happened quite frequently, and occasionally I had to stop students if their play became too dangerous or destructive. This process is rather lengthy and yet with practice and experience the simple act of putting on the nose will translate the 'normal' self into a 'foolish' self. However, it is for the students to experience this when they put on the nose, and provided the conditions are right for this embodiment most students will find themselves transformed by the nose, although, conversely some students do find that the sense of mystery surrounding the mask prevents them from playing freely, as they are in too much awe of the nose. In these cases I have found it works far better to suggest that the nose does not transform, but is used in a formal more abstract way to lend precise movement to the body leading the actor to explore the room with the nose as their lens. Frost and Yarrow, referencing the mask work training of another ex Lecoq teacher, Lassaad Saide, discuss this alternative approach to using the mask at some length in *Improvisation in Drama* (1990: 121-125).

There is the question whether the mask draws on the unconscious or does it transform the consciousness? Frost and Yarrow suggest that:

Trance or the power to change is not in the mask: it derives from the conjunction of mask, audience and actor. The wearer responds to stimuli both from the mask and from teachers and/or audience: what is involved is a dynamic process of co-creation. (1990: 125)

This is key to use of the mask in its transformative function, although there are other key factors in the success of any workshop, such as the atmosphere created by the space itself and consequently the use of that space by the teacher and students appropriate to the particular requirements of the content of the workshop. Sometimes this may be quite practical, such as good acoustics for a voice class, whilst at other times it may be dependent upon imponderable and accidental factors such as the composition of the group and their willingness to play. The teacher has to be sensitive to nuances, especially the relationship of students with each other and with the teacher. Johnstone (1981) refers to the different tone he adopts when he is teaching mask in contrast to when he is teaching dramatic improvisation. For the former he becomes very serious and plays the teacher; for the latter he fools about, and makes out that he is on the same level as the students.

I would propose that a common attribute of the clown is that she does not exist except in relation to her audience, and in addition I would suggest that it is almost impossible to rehearse clown without an audience, since so much is dependent on the interplay with that particular audience. Clowns can rehearse the movement, the sequences of the routine, the skills, but, more than any other form, the audience collectively direct the clowns in performance. The traditional cry of the clown on re-entering the circus ring, 'Here we are again,' clearly demonstrates that they only exist in the moment of performance, with an audience. The red nose not only transforms the wearer from actor self to clown self, but transforms the individual selves of the audience as well. In reality there is an extremely complex series of transactions and recognitions, which operate on the premise that permission to transgress is granted to the clown by the audience collectively and individually. In addition, although the clown may attempt to dissemble, it is immediately clear to an audience that the clown is dissembling, since the clown has no interiority, or, to put it more simply, 'it's only a clown.'

- As deconstructive:

I am not suggesting that the clown exists only because of the red nose or that the above functions are not present without the nose, but that these functions are heightened and focused by and through the red nose. This now leads me to consider what I have called the

‘deconstructive’ nose; that is the nose as an object to be played with, taken off, and used in some other way than as a nose, in the same way that object theatre transforms and uses objects, and so the nose becomes part of the wider vocabulary of clown play with objects. For example, the Swedish clown, Raimondo, whom I saw in 1988, nicely demonstrates this when he plays his violin, the squeaking strings of which become a crying baby, whose nappy, the shoulder cloth, he attempts to change. Clearly, the deconstructive nose has a triple function: it serves as a nose with all the other functions, reinforcing our reading of clown, but then plays with the stereotype of clown behaviour itself; finally the deconstruction is a metanarrative, displaying the mechanics of the clown, and commenting upon the clown’s behaviour, referring back to the clown’s world of playful subversion.

In 1996 the Russian clown, Slava Polunin appeared at The Hackney Empire, London in his show *Snowshow*. For a nose he wore what appears to be the top of a shaving foam canister, leading one to consider the semiotics of this particular nose. I suspect that on one level there is a fairly obvious explanation, in that if he forgets to pack or loses his nose on tour he goes out and buys a new can of shaving foam. I myself created a number in my solo show using a roll of sellotape, which meant that on a practical level the more ordinary the props the more easily I could replace them if I lost them. There was for me also an aesthetic of the ordinary, of creating magic with the everyday and the found, including brooms, a chair, and a hat. But I digress, so turning to Polunin, he performed an entrée in which he clownesquely and melodramatically dies, having left the stage and gone into the audience, arrows piercing him like St Sebastian. During this protracted dying, he paused, stood quite still, straddled on the back of a seat, looked around him and smiled beatifically at the audience. He then slowly removed his nose, held it up, and mimed ‘Cheers’ before sipping a refreshing drink. He replaced the nose and continued his clownesque dying as before, eventually making his way back onto the stage for the final death. This pause for refreshment not only revealed the person behind the clown, but also revealed the clown behind the person behind the clown, a deconstruction of our selves, reinforcing the mask, which reveals as it conceals; a post-modern gesture combined with a meta-theatrical act. It was not only a comment upon the relationship between clown and audience but nodded to a long tradition of clown self-revealing.

McManus, although his discussion focuses mainly on clowns in text-based drama, puts this in

the following way:

This blurring of the borders of mimetic space can usually be accounted for by one of two reasons. Either the clown is more aware of the fact that he or she is part of a theatrical illusion than the other characters, or he or she is too stupid to understand the rules governing the illusion being created. In other words, the clown is either too smart or too dumb. (2003: 12)

Yet the precise way that Slava performs the removal of his nose, his look of delight as he discovers that he could use it as a drinking glass, and his knowing look out to the audience as he drinks, suggests that Slava is both ‘too smart’ and ‘too dumb.’ On the other hand, the ‘too smart’ brings to mind the Music Hall comedian Little Tich, who, in his Music Hall routine in the early 20th century, would perform the classic hat kicking routine, in which every attempt to pick up his dropped hat would end up in his hat being kicked further out of his grasp. According to J.B. Priestley, writing in his short appreciation of Little Tich, eventually he would pause and comment on the comic business or comment that a joke ‘... “went better last night”’ (Priestley 1969: 170).

The Mimirichy clowns wear specially designed, different coloured noses, which not only emphasise their different roles and statuses in the hierarchy, which their performance then proceeds to subvert, but in addition express a personal and specific clown persona for each of them. One of the quartet whom I particularly remember, was outside the hierarchy, and was continually attempting to involve himself in the routines, from which the others excluded him. He did not wear a red nose, instead it was bottle green, and his persona was of a clown who continually veered between nearly crying and actual tears. This parodied the crying gag of many traditional Circus clowns in which tears are propelled in a water jet of five metres or more, but also reinforced a stock character. The reason for this particular clown’s upset was that he never received anything, praise, presents, and was continually given the cold shoulder by the other clowns, so it seemed absolutely right that he should wear a green, jealous nose. The choice of green nose was reminiscent of the representational colours of the costumes of *commedia* characters, which indicate basic and undeniable urges. Brighella wears white with green braid, for example, ‘...white because I have carte blanche to do or undo whatever I like;

green, because I can always keep the desires of my clients green with the many tricks of my devising' (Rudlin, 1994: 84). For the Mimirichy, like Slava, the clown's nose is not a fixed part of the body but revealed as a mask. This suggests that the body of the clown is in a constant state of amoeboid change, to alter at will, or sometimes by accident. There is a clear link between the relativity of the clown's body and the perspectival nature of truth. In addition, this chaos of body is carnivalesque in that it is open and full of holes, but is also an embodiment of contemporary philosophy, biology and physics, as well as a parody of the current desire to be able to change our bodies through surgery, diet and medicines.

The test:

So pause, address the audience directly, remove the nose, read what I have written, reflect, consider, critique. The basic signification, the permissive, the embodied, the transformative and the deconstructive functions of the red nose, work in the ways I have described. Yet there is something missing. Have I placed myself outside the material, as though the text is not me? Is there something I have forgotten?

What about just funny? Yeah, right, like when Marty Feldman's hump in *Young Frankenstein* (1974) keeps swapping sides. It's just there for a cheap laugh. Hey, what's the matter with a cheap laugh? Or an expensive one for that matter? Am I missing something here? Something which could be termed theory; like referring to Bakhtin and the carnivalesque, specifically the unfinished body? That's it! Feldman's hump displays the properties of the carnivalesque, unfinished body (Bakhtin 1984). Phew, saved by a theory! Ah, but remember in *Waiting for Godot*, the final most withering insult.. 'critic.' I'm not even going to reference that, hey. Stop, stop...where is this going, how can I finifinifinish?

(In Circus clown entrées, one frequent ending is ‘the knap and off,’ in which the Whiteface chases the other clowns off. They disappear, reappear, and take a bow to let the audience know that it’s the end, but then the process starts all over again. You can imagine this being repeated forever. The clown can’t conclude because the clown is not only being and doing but also becoming. So the red nose is an extension of this fluxus. It works when the clown explores it organically. When the nose ignores this, becomes fixed and immutable, then the red nose exists solely as a purely visual, picture book representation of the clown).

But sometimes ‘the knap and off’ is itself subverted. So, replace the nose, turn towards the audience, stand still, wait, look..

VLADIMIR: ‘Well? Shall we go?’

ESTRAGON: ‘Yes, let’s go’

They do not move.

Four solo clowns, learning through watching

Between 1986 and 1999, I worked mainly as a solo clown performer, and I often compared my practice with the practice of other clowns, not only how they performed and what they did, but also their professed and unprofessed aims. This was not scientific, there were no metrics but I consciously asked myself a number of questions: where do I stand in relation to other clowns?

How good am I? And yes, how well-known am I? Who were the other solo clowns? I was attempting to place myself in relationship to other clowns, to organise and stratify my clowning. Allsopp's assertion concerning the notion of ordering in art chimes with this:

...the artwork as a means of supporting or questioning the order of things, of bringing insight to the complexities of contemporary life, as a cultural device which brings a certain order or structure to bear on the complexity of everyday life... (2006: 1)

I crave order whilst acknowledging the impossibility of order, and in addition, definition. Townsen refers to the solo clown as an 'eccentric', and notes that, since the solo clown has no one else on stage to play with or bounce off, then she is much more dependent than the troupe, on play with props and objects, as well as creating a complicity with the audience to play (1976: 348). Within this general play there is a range of clown play with both objects and audience, which reveal different degrees of subversion. As I have shown Palfi, for instance, relies almost entirely on his audience to create his act, and there is frequent and deliberate participation from his audience throughout his show. Since his audience is mainly composed of children, the complicity with this particular audience is twofold. He is unable to do the simplest activity, such as dressing, without creating chaos, and his constant appeal to his public is asking them, 'Can I do it?' Consequently the children feel superior in knowledge and skill to the clown (of course we know how to dress ourselves). At the same time there is a complicity between Palfi and his young audience against the grown ups in the audience. Most of the grown ups are the children's parents or minders, and so there is the sense that the clown is subverting the normal rules of discipline and behaviour. In fact, in the fairly relaxed environment of a festival, where the norms of behaviour are turned upside down to some extent anyway, many of the grown ups enjoy the subversion. Although Palfi performs as a solo clown he is in some way the third member of the classical trio I have referred to. He is at the bottom of the hierarchy, the children who help him are representative of the Auguste, and the adults act as the Whiteface. Yet whilst Palfi plays stupid, the ways in which he relates to and interacts with his audience psychologically are extremely clever as well as cunning.

This is reminiscent of the American clown, Avner Eisenberg ('Avner the Eccentric'),

about whom Ron Jenkins in *Acrobats of the Soul*, states; ‘...his stage innocence is part of the act’ (1988: 92). A key difference between the performance of Palfi and that of Avner is that Avner’s audience is composed mainly of adults. It is noteworthy that Avner’s show, which was nominated for the Perrier Award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1991, was targeted at adults. His play with, and relationship to, his props is a key element of his act, and the sense of the human struggling with inanimate objects is much stronger than Palfi’s, yet Avner’s ineptitude is also misleading, concealing great skill and charm. He begins his show by entering as a stagehand, intent on sweeping up. He then proceeds to light a cigarette whilst sweeping, dropping cigarettes all over the floor, and getting tangled up in his coat. Eventually he notices his audience, and, feigning surprise, he proceeds to balance his broom on his nose, which receives a smattering of applause. This sets the tone for a highly virtuosic and entertaining performance, which includes extremely skilled balancing, acrobatics, and, as a finale, a magic act in which he eats many white paper napkins, creating a different object out of each napkin. For example, he makes a paper plane from one napkin which he throws, as it glides past he catches it, lizard like, and gobbles it up; he lays another napkin over his face like a second mask, creating a hole for his red nose to protrude through, and sucks it slowly into his mouth. Finally, Avner drinks a glass of red wine, and, with a flourish, pulls out a long string of linked red napkins. Avner’s performance is much less overtly subversive than Palfi’s not only in the sense that, although Palfi is playing for children, he is transgressing rules of taste and decorum, whereas Avner’s audience tends to be a more sophisticated theatre audience, but also there is much less apparent sense of improvisation and subsequent danger. As Jenkins states; ‘Every drop of a hat, every gasp of the crowd, every hum of his kazoo is calculated to give the illusion of spontaneity, when in fact it has been carefully planned by a clown who is a master of physical and psychological control’ (1988: 92). Although there is one long sequence in which he uses a member of his audience as a stooge for his magic, it is clear that Avner as the clown is in total control of both the participant, and of the entire audience. Jenkins, in analysing this sequence, writes:

Avner’s handling of the situation is impressive. His managerial skills are worthy of a top level corporate executive. The volunteer is used as a human toilet-paper dispenser; the audience laughs at her ignorance; Avner guides her into doing exactly what he wants her to do; but she leaves the stage feeling good about her

participation in the event, without a trace of humiliation.(1988:98)

Avner's act, therefore, is marvellously entertaining, playful and skilled, but at no time is there a feeling of danger or social boundaries being transgressed. Even though the divide between clown and audience is physically broken, what still remains intact is the sense that he remains in complete control. Add in some very high skills, and the enduring image is of a virtuoso clown whom we, as audience, could never emulate.

In Chapter One I noted Dario Fo's subjective viewpoint of clown, based upon his own practice. Although I have never seen Fo himself perform live, I have seen television excerpts of *Mistero Buffo* (1988), have seen *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1980), as well as *Can't Pay, Won't Pay* (1983) and have read writings on his performances and plays by several critics (Mitchell 1984; Schechter 1985; Jenkins 1995; McManus 2003). So sharply engraved on my consciousness is Fo's work, it is almost as though I have seen Fo perform. All my performance practice has implicitly referred to Fo's political clowning. All the above critics consider his solo show *Mistero Buffo* to be the work of a political clown. Jenkins suggests that not only is Fo's material in his solo show both specifically political, as when, in his prologues to particular performances, Fo would depict and parody current events, but generally political, in that the subject matter of *Mistero Buffo* is concerned with social and political issues concerned with class and power, 'Of course, there is a fundamentally political dimension to all of Fo's work, which includes mocking references to police brutality, government fraud, and social injustice.' (Jenkins 1995: 260) However, in the same essay Jenkins cautions against too obvious a political reading, and suggests that the politics are also expressed through language, where Fo employs dialect; the rhythm and cadence of the performance, which runs counter to a 'polished' performance. In addition there is Fo's relationship with his audiences. He has frequently performed in unconventional spaces and to a large popular audience. For Fo in *Mistero Buffo* his body is his sole prop, which he uses in unconventional and frequently grotesque ways, as for example, when he plays the solo sequence of St Boniface, during which, through expert mime and facial and body contortion, he appears to create an entire populace. As McManus points out; 'By using these different techniques, he can embody the entire cast of characters in himself, without the audience

becoming confused' (2003:120). Fo's relationship with his audience and the way he plays is in contrast to the more gentle, but highly manipulative relationship that Avner has with his audience. Nevertheless, the relationship which both clowns have with their props (including body), rhythm and audience is appropriate for their particular performance and for their apparent aims of their performance.

The fourth clown, the Russian, Vladimir Olshansky, whom I saw at the Clowns International Festival in Bognor Regis in 1989, I term an 'existentialist clown', by which I mean that through an apparent simplicity of clownesque performance he reveals a world in which existence is all that we have. There is no teleology and no point to existence, other than to exist. Through images, entrées and scenography which place a human being in a timeless space, barely coping with life, Olshansky's clowning is touching, provocative and yet comic. McManus refers to Beckett's use of clowns in his plays, and states; '...Beckett's characters are presented in situations that offer them little positive action and their transformational qualities have little bearing on the social situation' (2003: 71). Certainly there is something of the Beckettian clown and Beckett's dramaturgy as defined by McManus in Olshansky's performance. From his entrance, through the audience, with a stuffed rubber glove on a stick, mournfully and gently hitting members of the public on the head, one feels a sense of bleakness, which is both comic and hopeless. Although there is a suggestion of the traditional jester's bladder, there is nothing of the exuberance, mayhem and gleeful Lord of Misrule of, for example, Ken Dodd wielding his tickling stick. Olshansky's gesture is almost a weary question: what else can a clown do? In addition, his exhausted mournfulness plays upon the double expectation that audiences have of clown behaviour, so there is a subversion of the loud and comical aspects of clown, but also a reinforcement of the stereotypical sad clown. This is contrasted with Olshansky's brightly coloured motley, and large red nose, the traditional signifiers of the clown.

One of Olshansky's solo entrées reinforces the play between the audience's expectation of what a clown does and what a clown is. He enters and sits on a little stool, looking out over his audience. He goes to his mime door and mimes locking and bolting it with a number of locks. He then goes to the mime window upstage, and closes it, then draws what we imagine

are thick, heavy curtains. He then makes the sound of a phone ringing, and mimes answering. From memory the dialogue proceeds, ‘Hello,’ (pause), ‘How am I? (pause), ‘I’m fine.’ He puts the phone down and sits waiting more mournful than before. Slowly he stands and climbs onto his stool, and mimes placing a rope around his neck. He is just about to jump, when there is a knocking, made by Olshansky himself. He starts to dismount, forgetting the rope around his neck. The subsequent laugh as he has to stop to take it off, is punctuated by a pause and a slow look towards his audience. He goes over to his mime door, and mimes opening it a tiny crack, after undoing a large number of mime locks and bolts, and, peering out, he says, ‘How am I?’ (pause), ‘I’m fine.’ He closes the door, relocks it, comes back to his stool and sits again, staring out at the audience, waiting. His posture suggests both utter dejection as well as acceptance. Then he has an idea, again suggested subtly, through realistic acting rather than the exaggerated acting normally associated with the clown. Slowly he walks over to his window, draws back the thick curtains, undoes the bolt, and raises the sash window. He sticks his head out, surveys his audience and then says to us, ‘How are you?’ Instinctively we all replied, ‘I’m fine.’ There was a few seconds of silence, followed by the realisation of the enormity of what we had just said, which was again broken a few seconds later by laughter.

This short but masterly exposition of the art of clown could be read in several ways. Firstly, as I have said, Olshansky portrayed an existentialist clown who was both specific in his clownesque qualities, yet appeared to represent a general aspect of the alienation and exile of the human in the late twentieth century. His act was reminiscent of Buster Keaton in Beckett’s short film, *Film* (1972). Keaton attempts to escape from being perceived by finally removing everything from his room which can see him, including covering up the mirror, before realising that what is left is self-perception, or as Beckett states, quoting Bishop Berkeley, in the scenario, with an essay by Allan Schneider, the Director, on the making of *Film*, ‘esse est percipi.’ (1972: 11). Secondly, Olshansky’s act resonates with the suggestion by McManus that, ‘...clown, as adopted by twentieth century artists, has more frequently been the means by which the contemporary tragic impulse has been expressed.’ (2003: 11). Ashley Tobias, in his essay *The Postmodern Theatre Clown*, terms this category of clown “clowns of defeat” (2007: 39), although I suggest that “clowns of acceptance” would be a more

appropriate term. Tobias proposes that, ‘They are very different from the traditional clown and represent a break from the clown tradition by radically inverting the universal clown characteristics’ (2007: 39). Tobias’s categories of clown (‘traditional’, ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’) represent another and quite persuasive attempt to structure the practices of clown, which I noted at the beginning of this thesis. Interesting though his categories are, I am, however, puzzled by his referencing Lindsay Kemp as an exemplar of a postmodern clown. I am familiar with Kemp’s work, and am a friend of one of his long-term performers, and I would hesitate to call Kemp a clown. But perhaps this reinforces my point about the difficulties of definition.

However, Olshansky’s act moves beyond the defeatist by firstly embracing the despair, and then challenging it through the audience. In that sense, ‘I’m fine’ is both untrue and true. Secondly, Olshansky provides a further conduit through which the audience, in that one short sentence, ‘I’m fine,’ can express their own sense of alienation, as well as revealing the repetition and falsity of habit and custom of much of our daily behaviour. Thirdly, Olshansky, like the other clowns I have mentioned, indulges in some basic audience participation, this time the traditional call and response. An analysis of the entrée reveals that it is based around the ‘rule of three’; that is, set up the routine, reinforcement through repetition with details changed, and then finally change the ending, which surprises the audience, and ‘gets’ the laugh. Many comedians, and amateur comedians, consider this rule to be one of the basic tropes of comedy. In other words, the structure, the use of the audience and the clown himself suggested a traditional clown act, yet within this embodiment there lay a provocative and philosophical debate about the state of the world, which encompassed Tobias’s ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ categories of clown. I suggest that antecedent for this act is that of ‘the wise fool’ of Shakespeare (Bate 2000: 18 and throughout), and the structure of the entrée echoes Arlecchino’s *Lazzo of Despair (or Suicide)* of the *commedia dell’arte*, dating from 1684 (Gordon 1983: 49). As McManus puts it; ‘While clowns are disruptive characters on the one hand, they also act as a bridge between the mimetic world of the play, or show, and the worlds of the audience’ (2003: 14).

So far, so?

The four solo clowns I have discussed above, with their individual yet overlapping modes of clowning, represent a paradigm against which I place my own solo performance up to 1999. Furthermore, I can see that the learning through watching gave me confidence to experiment throughout this period, with discarding the traditional signifiers of the clown, the costume and make up, but later permitted me to bring them back, albeit in an understated way, with ‘Incorporated Knowledge’ (Hastrup 1995:2), and understanding of my own individual clown. This experimentation and practice also allowed me to undertake a wide range of projects, including circus, text based theatre and forays into site-specific and cross-disciplinary work, such as the aforementioned *Love Me Tender* (1994), which then led into the projects from 2000 which place the clown in a relationship with other performance practices, including site-specific performance, durational practice and use of visual arts and new technologies. In addition to the actual making and performing of my own work, notably *Before Your Very Eyes* (1986-2000) and the theatre piece *Don’t Worry* (1990), my further and deliberate training throughout this period in related areas, provided a different perspective on and helped developed my practice of and reflection upon clown. This period was also a time when I began to teach and devise work with and direct other companies, such as No Fit State Circus; No 2 Theatre Co and The Foolhardy Folk. From 1992-1996, for six months each year, I was manager and Course Director of the Zippo touring Circus School, The Academy of Circus Arts.

Another element that gradually revealed itself is that of chance in all the projects I have undertaken, as well as the lack of precautions I have taken to avoid them. As an improviser I tend to say ‘yes...’, so it is worth reiterating the example of the character of Clive Fish, who was devised for my solo theatre show *Don’t Worry*, which toured small theatres and Arts centres throughout 1990. Over time this character forced himself into other performances and improvisations and may still be seen twenty years later as the tour guide in the current *Misguided Tour*. In addition I stress that the devising work I undertook with and for other companies was, at first, on a very informal basis, and consisted of me being asked by two solo clowns Francis Maxey and Michael Harvey (1992), who wanted to work together, to have a

look at and make suggestions about their work. Over a period of time this became formal in the sense of being acknowledged and paid and asked for by the companies. Gradually the different activities I engaged in as a clown: performer, director, deviser, student and teacher, became synthesised and co-dependent. I was being seen as something of an expert in my field, with the attendant very real danger in that when the clown becomes an expert, and is recognised as an expert, the question remains where has the clown gone? Happily, there remains the nagging feeling that, despite having expertise thrust upon me, I am still the impostor in all the institutions in which I find myself, and I have to continually remind myself that I am meant to be there.

Chapter Four: KING UBU GOES TO PRISON¹⁴

Institutions are messy too

This chapter analyses my clown role in a project in which I was involved in West Hill Prison, Winchester, March 2007 - a production of Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu* (2007). Students from the University of Winchester, staff from the Department of Performing Arts at the University, prison staff and prisoners all collaborated in the rehearsing and performance of the play. Throughout this chapter I shall refer to this production as the 'Prison Project'. The collaboration between a prison, a 'total institution' (Goffman 1961) and the more open and collegiate institution of the university raises some interesting tensions between their practices, as they appear to operate at opposite ends of an institutional continuum. However I intend to show that through this collaboration, the tensions between their respective practices actually open up fruitful and creative space for exploration, both through the production generally and through my role as clown director specifically. This links with the second aim of this chapter, which is to identify the nature of institutions and the ways in which institutions too, whilst seemingly structured and inflexible, are much more permeable, flexible and fluid, as I noted previously in Chapter One. The clown does not play against the practices of the institution but plays in and with the rules and practices of the institution.

The literature on institutional theory is vast and is concerned with the multifarious ways in which institutions operate. In its history there have been '...varying meanings and usages of the concept of *institution*' (Scott 2008: introduction x; italics in original). The questions I shall address in this section are: are there common characteristics of institutions and if so what are they? Can the institution be defined? To do this I shall draw on W. Richard Scott's analysis of 'neo-institutional theory' in his book, *Institutions and Organizations* (2008). Neo-institutional theory dates from approximately the 1950s, and affirms, as I noted previously, that although institutions are in a state of constant change through their practices they connote stability. Neo-institutional theory also attempts to define the differences between

¹⁴ An abbreviated version of this chapter was given as a paper entitled 'Fooling the Prison' at the *Playing for Laughs* conference, De Montfort University, Leicester 7th February 2009, and again at the *International Seminar of Doctoral Studies*, Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Brno, Czech Republic, 4th-5th December 2009.

organisations and institutions and to characterise institutional types. A key feature is that all institutions are organisations but not all organisations are institutions

The perceived stability of institutions is partly because the process of becoming an institution or ‘institutionalisation’ happens over a period of time. Some, though not all, organisations that have staying power become accepted as institutions. Although a list of commonly accepted institutions may be generally agreed upon, such a list will also be a personal one. My own list includes: the law, the police, government, education, the stock exchange, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, the monarchy, the military, the university, prisons, the Queen, The Royal Variety Show, and the Church, amongst others. It is immediately apparent from the above list that some institutions are generic and others specific, for example, the university is generic whereas the University of Winchester is a specific institution. This list is clearly subjective and almost certainly the list says something about me, my time, place and interests, and it certainly says something about my culture and my identity within that culture. Another person may agree with my choices but would choose other institutions according to their individual identity and preferences. For me, what connects these disparate organisations and goes some way towards defining the institution is that institutions possess material and/or symbolic power and this power exerts a hold over and directs our imaginations, actions and aspirations. Those of us within an institution are affected by the power of the institution. We are not necessarily at the mercy of the institution and we may wield limited power ourselves. As I argue, we may also – as the clown does – play with the structures of the institution.

Scott’s definition of institutions is extremely useful as a working definition which may be applied to all types of institution:

In this conception, institutions are multifaceted durable social structures made up of symbolic elements, social activities and material resources. Institutions exhibit distinctive properties: They are relatively resistant to change (Jepperson 1991). They tend to be transmitted across generations, to be maintained and reproduced (Zucker 1977). (Scott 2008: 48-49)

Scott draws on a vast number of historical and contemporary sources and approaches from scholars of social theory, economics and political theory. It is the fruit of a broad study of many sources and research projects and provides a lens through which it is possible to see how and why the behaviour of the human actors in an institution is regulated and constrained, but also empowered and enabled by the methods and ethos of the institution. It does generally accord with the definition by Ritchie Robertson in *Kafka: a Very Short Introduction*, who writes ‘Institutions are types of social organizations, serving particular purposes, such as the household, the family, the business corporation, the government ministry, the school, the hospital, the prison’ (Robertson 2004: 67). However he further considers the ambiguity of its use, writing:

The word ‘institution’ tends to slip from its general meaning to a more specific sense, denoting especially those institutions where people are confined, allegedly for their own good and often against their wishes, such as old people’s homes, mental asylums and jails. (Robertson 2004: 67)

This is helpful but the uses of the word ‘institution’ imply a number of different concepts for different individuals, who identify a range of organisations as institutions depending on context, and that any attempt at a precise and concise definition is impossible, revealing a continuum in the use of the word.

The Total Institution?

In *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1991)

Erving Goffman explores closed institutions, focussing mainly on mental asylums, but also prisons, which he calls ‘Total institutions’. He writes, ‘A Total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like situated-individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life’ (1991:11). ‘Total institution’ is a somewhat misleading term, as it is total for only a percentage of people in the institution. A large percentage of the population in a prison are the prison warders, administrators, education officers, and external visitors, such as me, who are able to come and go, although they may be constrained by standard institutional

practices, such as time-keeping. It is also probable that the extreme regulative practices in such an institution are endorsed by those in charge at all levels, and that the institutional regulative culture conditions all aspects of the practice. However I maintain that Total institutions are a hybrid of what Richard Scott calls the ‘three pillars of the institution’: the regulative, the normative and the cultural-cognitive.

From the outside, the prison appears to be a repressive and ultra monologic institution but is in actuality quite permeable, and the simple and obvious comic practices of the clown, whether accidental or deliberate, reveal the fissures, cracks and fault lines of the institution. Clowning was officially sanctioned and highly visible in the project itself, and yet, extremely important for this study, there was invisible and non sanctioned clowning by the inmates outside the project and throughout the production. These provided a counter-narrative to the extreme regulative constraints of the prison. In addition, the practices of the ‘three institutional pillars’, continually come into contact with each other, clash, and synthesise. The fruitfulness and creativity of a production of *King Ubu* in prison arises from this clash of practices.

The regulative pillar frames the workings of institutions in the broadest sense and it is clear that in this broad sense that prisons are examples of extreme regulative practices:

In this conception, regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions – rewards or punishments – in an attempt to influence future behavior. These processes may operate through diffuse, informal mechanisms, involving folkways such as shaming or shunning activities, or they may be highly formalized and assigned to specialized actors, such as the police and courts. (2008: 52)

In contrast, the normative pillar owes much to the individual in the institution conforming to what Scott refers to as the ‘values’ and ‘norms’ of that institution: ‘Normative systems define goals or objectives (e.g. winning the game, making a profit), but also designate appropriate ways to pursue them (e.g. rules specifying how the game is to be played, conceptions of fair business practices)’ (2008: 55). Scott adds that the expectations are

frequently prescriptive and goals and objectives are set which the actor must attain or risk sanctions. A normative system constrains behaviour but also enables its actors giving them certain privileges and power (2008: 55).

Scott defines cultural-cognitive institutional practices as '...the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made' (2008: 57). Meanings arise in interaction and are maintained and transformed as they are employed to make sense of the ongoing stream of happenings' (2008: 57). I take this to mean that an individual's internalised, subjective understanding of specific institutional practices and methods become externalised into agreed set procedures and methods. The institutional practices may not be overt and may be invisible, but all actors recognise them. Individual actors contribute to the processes, and since the internalisation by the individual is constantly changing and moving, particularly in small ways, so the institution itself is constantly readjusting to circumstance. The cultural-cognitive pillar does place a great emphasis on each individual contributing to the shaping of the institution. From my reading, in cultural cognitive framings of the institution there is less emphasis on the global forces and historical contexts which shape institutional practices. It is apparent that no matter how regulative the institution of the prison is, the individual in the prison does have some agency. The 'cultural-cognitive' practices do permit a counter-narrative, and open a crack for broadly creative practices, and specifically permit elements of the clownesque.

Whilst application of theories of institutional practice to understanding the ways in which institutions operate do provide a revealing and helpful framework for the research into institutions, they cannot entirely account for understanding the creativity at the core of this enquiry. In *After Method: Mess in Social Science* John Law considers '...what happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse and messy. The answer, I will argue, is that it tends to make a mess of it. This is because simple clear descriptions don't work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent' (2004:2). His argument is not that quantitative and qualitative social science research methods are not valuable nor that they do not bring valid results, but that these methods and theoretical frameworks by themselves are not sufficient to unravel the complexities of those areas of research which are slippery, and in

flux, as they still ‘...tend to work on the assumption that the world is properly to be understood as a set of fairly specific, determinate and more or less identifiable processes (2004: 5, italics in original). He maintains that even the radical philosophical positions employed by post-structuralists such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and Derrida, whose writings have inspired many social science researchers as a means to frame the arbitrary and the nameless, are often employed in support of scientists’ accounts of reality as fixed and ‘robust’ (2004: 9). Law is a social scientist working in the disciplines of ‘science, technology and society’ (2004: 8), and he is challenging scientific certainty and epistemologies, but nevertheless this proposal rings true for my own project, which, like most projects is messy, but celebrates the messiness of the practices of my own clown, and represent it messily in this thesis. As I have demonstrated throughout the previous three chapters, my clowning has never been set and fixed but has been in a process of constant change. Furthermore, I have been selective in my tracing, choosing those practices which can be partly pinned down. Clowns will talk about their ‘character’ for convenience sake, but an individual clown is a set of practices which are constantly changing, drawing on the practice of other clowns, often unacknowledged, as well as drawing on influences from outside the sphere of clowning. The reality of an embodied practice is much more complex than the binary division the title of this study implies.

This caveat also holds for the attempt to successfully describe the embodied practices of the clown through writing. In Chapter Three I described and analysed the work of four clowns and their continuum of practice as markers which allow me to reflect on and place my own practice. Later in this chapter I shall reflect upon the work of two other clown companies, Derevo and Mik and Mak, as a means to unlock the text of *King Ubu*. Whilst I find this extremely helpful as a method, what is missing is the actuality of an embodied practice. For example, Dario Fo’s explicitly political practices are verbalised and reflective and he has written and lectured about his own and others’ practices. His political stance informs his theatre in several ways, and is both personal and yet draws on political theories. He has a general political stance, broadly communist, although adapted to fit the Italian post war context. Frequently his plays have specific political targets, such as police corruption and mendacity in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (2003b). Moreover the very act of his theatre

is itself a political statement, as he has frequently taken his productions to non-theatre spaces, such as the workers' canteens in factories throughout Italy (see Mitchell 1984).

Clearly there are a number of contexts in which Fo's work operates but nevertheless I maintain that his practice, as that of all clowns, is first and foremost an embodied, personal practice, emanating from that individual. Not for nothing do many teachers of clown start their teaching by simply asking their students to walk into the space and, standing there, make the audience laugh. This is an almost impossible task, destined to failure as the student will almost always try to be funny rather than allowing the audience to find the person funny. A good clown teacher will often leave the student standing there after they have failed, and almost always the audience will find the truthful acknowledgement of their failure funny. Paradoxically failure is success and a successful clown is a failure. (I count myself amongst these failures of course). Fo's political convictions and his attacks on specific political corruption are the reason why he clowns, and the clown is an excellent agent for his attacks on corruption, not the least of which is that it makes us laugh, but there are many other ways of attacking political corruption. The foundation of Fo's actual clowning is therefore phenomenological. He starts with the clown because he can't not...a clown is a clown is a clown. Likewise, my starting point for contextualising the clown and his meeting with the institution is from a clown's eye view, that is, from inside the practice.

Playing with clown

I had never been in prison before so it was with a mixture of fear, nervousness, excitement and ignorance that I was admitted into West Hill Prison, Winchester. Ostensibly I was the clown expert with all that the word entails, yet I myself was the naïve fool in the project with images of prison culled from film and TV. Would it be like *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)? Looking back on the experience I am reminded of Philippe Gaulier's definition of the clown, as someone who has, 'le caca dans les pantalons' (pooh pooh in your pants, (my translation)) as well as that feeling, well known to clowns, of being an impostor, a fake, especially as my practice has not been text based and nor is it based in applied and community theatre. But then I am comforted by the fact that many classical clown entrées are based upon the clown as

impostor, the clowns pretending to be what they are not. Moreover, my role in the Prison Project was in two areas in which I am experienced, - that of teacher of clowning through workshops, and director of the clowning during the rehearsals in the prison. During this process I privately designated my function as ‘clown advisor’, although on reflection I now realise that I was undertaking a dramaturgical role, albeit a clown dramaturg. I shall develop my analysis of this role in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. The project was produced by Annie McKean, who received funding from the Arts Council of England, and is a Drama Lecturer and colleague, at the University of Winchester. Annie adapted and edited the three *Ubu* plays (*Ubu Rex*, *Ubu Cuckolded*, and *Ubu Enchained* (Jarry 2002), to create a 90 minute performance specifically for the production in the prison. There were four performances, three for the public and one for other prisoners, which took place in the prison gymnasium converted into a makeshift theatre by the technical staff at the University. Annie had produced theatre projects in the prison since 2002, and was very experienced in this area of practice. The students involved came mainly from the BA Drama Applied Theatre module, and was co-directed by a third year Drama student, and the Education Officer, who had graduated from the BA Drama degree at Winchester herself. There was no selection process either of the students or of the prisoners from West Hill, who chose to take part, although prisoners’ participation could be terminated by the prison authorities at any time.

This collaborative method, which started from a text, was very different to the way I am used to working, as deviser of the material, and a new model of collaboration to those I analysed in Chapter One. The practices of the clown were initially employed interpretively, as a means of unlocking the text and providing a framework for the production, rather than as a method of play for creating material, which would later be edited and developed through the devising strategies by the clown performers. Much of the rehearsal time was therefore spent in identifying, embodying and refining areas and structures for clown play in the text itself. The rehearsals also raised a further area of enquiry about how clown practices might play with the tensions between an embodied, personal clown practice, which I have noted above, and the demands of working with a text, which, although open for interpretation and adaptation, is nevertheless set and external. McManus’s focus in *No Kidding* (2003) is on playwrights, such as Brecht and Beckett, who have used the figure of the clown in their plays, whereas a

question for me throughout this project was the opposite: to investigate how the clown might use a text which is not specifically based around the character of the clown. In conjunction with this question is a broader concern with the ways in which language itself is used in clown practice. I shall focus at greater length on textual analysis in Chapter Five, 'Fooling Hamlet', but I shall use an example of how Jarry's text might be interpreted for clown play, by selecting the opening scene and reflecting on both the context of its composition, and the actual language used.

Jarry first conceived of *Ubu* in 1888 when he was a fifteen year old schoolboy, loosely basing it on *Macbeth*. It is a darkly comic tale of corruption and power in which the shifty and slobbish Pa Ubu, abetted and controlled by his wife, Ma Ubu, murders all those who get in his way on his rise to power as king. Jarry wanted it to be played in a totally non-realistic manner, and employed some invented and exaggerated language and dramaturgy, which has been difficult to translate into English. Originally conceived as a play for puppets, it owes much to nineteenth century French Melodrama, and resonates with the macabre hyperrealism of Grand Guignol, which dates from 1897 (Hand and Wilson 2000). In addition Christopher Innes (1993) claims that it draws on French symbolist theatre. The play has been hugely influential, especially on the so-called Theatre of the Absurd, but also on Dada and Surrealism as well as more recent black comedy, such as *The League of Gentlemen* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. In *The Empty Space* Peter Brook maintains that the plays need to be reworked and exploded for them to possess contemporary resonance (1990: 77-78). Banned after *Ubu Rex*'s first theatrical performance in Paris in 1898, which caused a huge scandal, nowadays the language, scenography and dramaturgy seem much tamer, but when I first read it myself as a schoolboy I found it highly subversive. That was many years ago and I was very naïve, but my reaction mirrors that of the history of the play. As Innes notes, when it was performed again in 1908, preceded by an academic lecture, '...appraising Jarry's literary significance' (1993: 28), the audience accepted it without a qualm. Innes makes the perceptive point, 'The most dispiriting thing for an artist who aims to *épater les bourgeois* is the capacity for society to absorb irritants, like an oyster seeing dirt thrown into the

works only as a potential pearl'(1993: 28, italics in original). One way that the institution deals with transgression is to accept and praise it.

However, the text immediately evokes a world of parodic slapstick violence, and the text itself shows clear clownesque elements throughout. These elements include obscenity, nonsense words, play with language, and repeated phrases. The opening of the play provides a good example of this play with language:

Pa Ubu: Pschitt!

Ma Ubu: Ooh, what a nasty word. Pa Ubu, you're a dirty old man.

Pa Ubu: Watch out I don't bash yer nut in, Ma Ubu!

Ma Ubu: It's not me you should want to do in, Old Ubu. Oh no! There's someone else for the high jump.

Pa Ubu: By my green candle, I'm not with you.

Ma Ubu: How come, Old Ubu, you mean you're content with your lot?

Pa Ubu: By my green candle, pschitt, Madam. Yes by god, I'm perfectly satisfied. Who wouldn't be? Captain of the Dragoons, aide de camp to King Wenceslas, decorated with the order of the Red Eagle of Poland, and ex king off Aragon. You can't go higher than that!

Ma Ubu: So what! After having been King of Aragon, you're content to ride in reviews with fifty bumpkins armed with billhooks, when you could get your loaf measured for the crown of Poland?

(1, 1, 1-14)

It is apparent that the language used is colloquial, informal and direct, inappropriate to the ambition of the characters, and the opposite of the formal language of both French classical dramatists, such as Racine and Corneille, and of Romantic dramatists, such as Hugo. Despite the colloquial tone, however, the language used has many complex resonances which need to be considered in performance. The opening word in the French text is 'merdre' which has been variously translated as 'Pschitt' or 'Shikt'. This corruption of 'shit' was considered shocking on its first performance, and although it is has less power to shock now, nevertheless the absurd transformation of the word renders it both harmless and effectively resonant. The combination of childlike play with an obsession with bodily functions, synthesised in a common yet twisted swear word is carnivalesque, and of the type which Bakhtin would call an example of 'Various genres of billingsgate; curses, oaths, popular blazons' (1984: 5). Beyond this it is an example of

clever word play, and, even though the play was written pre-Freud, nevertheless Freud's claim in *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious* (1976) that humour allows unconscious and repressed fascinations to be voiced appears to be substantiated here. What the English translation does not adequately convey is that, in the original French, 'merdre' can be seen as a play on 'meurtre', that is 'murder'. The very first utterance metonymically encapsulates the entire theme of the play. Likewise the phrase 'By my green candle', which is repeated throughout the trilogy and is, in effect, a catch-phrase of Ubu himself, is a clear reference to the phallus. Further, its greenness metaphorically mixes the suggestion of mouldiness and disease with the implication of the possessor of the candle being green, that is virginal and naïve. In French, there is the further sense that Ubu's 'green candle' is semi-erect (*verte/verticale*).

In her book *Language Through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics*, the French linguist Marina Yaguello (1998) discusses linguistics and language and focuses in detail on when and how language speakers use language in playful, poetic and subversive ways. As her title suggests she draws a great many of her examples from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass*. Whilst she does not mention clown practices specifically, nevertheless there are many resonances with the clown's use of language, especially the way in which clowns play with and delight in the contrary use of language, including parody and puns, and the inappropriateness of the language they use in their *entrées* and exchanges. Throughout Yaguello considers how language is open to misinterpretation, and how much of language use is phatic. As Yaguello writes: 'In order to achieve successful communication, speakers must assess the social role and status of each participant in the language event' (1998: 111). Thus both Pa and Ma Ubu, in the example of their language use given above, display a disregard for the supposed status required to be King and Queen. By its lack of appropriateness the speech also parodies and yet refers to an appropriate tone for the language of tragedy. It is an example of meta-language. As Yaguello maintains, 'From the community into which the speaker is integrated s/he receives a 'language system' with a 'set of instructions for use', but also a set of 'counter instructions' (a set of

deconstructions?) the use of which is merely another way of demonstrating one's mastery of the instructions' (1998: 110).

The text of *King Ubu* is therefore open for clown business and it is particularly significant that just as the clown plays with the body in a variety of ways, in parallel with this bodily play, the clown messes with language. However in order to subvert the use of language it should be noted that the clown recognises the rules of language and then undercuts them. Conversely by subverting the rules of language, the rules become clear. In analysing comic uses of language Yaguello writes, 'Playing on an ambiguity, for example, *reaffirms* a distinction while pretending to be ignorant of it, for comic effect is not achieved if one is not aware of the ambiguity' (1998: 110). Both oral and written forms of language communication are practices of the institution, and are obviously the main means that members of an institution communicate with each other, so the range of ways in which clowns encounter, play with and twist language is itself a subversion of the rules of the institution. Restating this in performance terms, the text itself is not meant to be read and analysed solely as a literary text, but is to be performed by actors, or as in the case of this project, clowns. An interpretation of how to play has to be placed on the text, which goes beyond the words, and therefore the text is embodied. The marginality of the clown whose voice and body speak in unusual, naive and comic ways, which are inappropriate to the context and social situation, is key to the mode of performance of the text. In the prison the inappropriate behaviour of the clown is highlighted, and paradoxically becomes highly appropriate. This was enhanced further through the choice of *King Ubu* as the text, on which was placed a clownesque mode of playing.

However, mindful of Brook's assertion above, although the text may be open for an embodiment by the practices of the clown, it is evident that a reading of the text does engender some further questions about how the text might be performed to draw out and develop its subversive qualities, especially in those areas where the narrative and action deal with violence. The violence is comic because it is exaggerated and unreal, but there are scenes when it does relate to a real threat, with moral and ethical implications. For example, the threat by Pa Ubu in line 2, 'Watch out I don't bash yer nut in, Ma Ubu' is

much more problematic for a contemporary audience than in Jarry's time. Although the threat is apparently comic, and played comically, nevertheless it makes for uneasiness for audiences today. Therefore it was vital to find a mode of performance that enfolds both the real and the unreal possibilities of violence, but which nevertheless retains the playfulness of the figure of the clown. A clue may be that the comic yet disturbingly violent threat of Pa Ubu towards Ma Ubu is more akin to the outrageous threats of the figure of the bouffon, the deformed and disfigured exile and outsider, as proposed by Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier in their teaching, than the naïve innocence of the foolish clown, whose violence tends to be more playfully self-referential and layered with expectation rather than actual threat and violence. In fact, in his 'stage' on bouffon, which I took in 1992, Philippe Gaulier refers to King Ubu, as an exemplar of the mode of playing of the bouffon.

Gaulier's concept of the characters as bouffons resonated with me throughout the production and I was presented with a dilemma, which I discussed with Annie McKean - namely how might the different yet related practices of the clown and the bouffon be fruitfully explored and synthesised in this production? I partially solved it by thinking about and analysing the practices of other clowns who play with the limits of slapstick and violence, and using elements of their practice to inform my teaching of clown and directing of the clown scenes. In particular, I drew upon work of the Dresden based Russian company Derevo who, in their show *Red Zone* (1998) play with real and fake violence, and, in contrast to Derevo, the work of the Russian clowns, Mik and Mak (1993), who provide an excellent example of how contemporary clowns play with violence, in that their slapstick is extremely gentle, and yet the threat towards the audience is real. Both Derevo and Mik and Mak were helpful exemplars for examining a clownesque understanding of the text, in a similar way that the four clowns I referred to in Chapter Three were exemplars for my clown practice, and I shall now provide an analysis of their practices.



Pa Ubu and Ma Ubu - between clown and bouffon

In *Red Zone* Derevo allied elements of the clown with other performance forms including butoh, and dance, with a particular focus on the scenography¹⁵. The actors began the show as traditional clowns, indulging in deliberately obvious slapstick. For the audience there was an immediate sense of recognition of clown behaviour, a feeling of safety and of well worn and much copied routines. The clowns are playing clowns, with little kicks and slaps, exaggerated reactions and pauses to make eye contact with the audience, each attempting to gain our sympathy. At one point one of the clowns pauses, and comes down from the stage into the audience, still smiling. Immediately there is the threat that we might be required to participate, which inculcates a frisson of nervousness in the audience. Participation duly happens in a casual and almost offhand manner, in that the clown offers his bottom to a member of the audience to be kicked, improvising with the audience until someone takes him up on this and kicks him, provoking laughter through the play. A further

¹⁵ The following section until the end of the first paragraph on p.119 is an adaptation of a paper entitled 'Really real and fakely real violence and the clownesque' given at the *Violence and Laughter on the Modern European Stage* symposium, University of Aberystwyth, 6th October 2007

laugh occurs when the clown is kicked, and he pauses, looks at the audience member in outrage, and then relays this outrage to the rest of the audience. This is a further example of clown self-revealing, which was noted in the discussion of Slava Polunin in Chapter Three - the look not only reveals the person behind the clown, but also reveals the clown behind the person behind the clown. The carnivalesque swapping of roles, and closing of the space between audience and performer through the real kick, creates laughter but also plays on the supposed relationship between audience and performer. The kick the audience member gives the clown is a real kick; the decision of how hard to kick is in his or her hands, and yet the kick is ritualised and enacted by the audience member and, by association, with the other members of that audience. The audience member's kick has become a collective response. The kicks the clowns have previously given each other are real, and yet we, the audience, despite the evidence of our eyes, pretend they are unreal. To admit they are real would be too revealing of ourselves, perhaps unbearable, and we would not laugh. This is reinforced when the clown returns to the stage; a locus where the unreal becomes real, for what ensues is that the kicks bestowed upon each other by the clowns become ferocious and all too real. This leads into a knife throwing act, in which the thrower eventually hurls the knives upstage at another clown who has to dodge them. At this point there is apparently real danger, recognised as such by the audience, but, at the same time unreal in that we, in the audience, do not feel threatened but are distanced from the reality by the illusion of the stage.

This sequence is actually a five minute pre-show, literally a curtain raiser to the main body of the show, for, when the knife throwing is at its height, the battered backdrop flies up, the clowns divest themselves of their motley, to reveal their nearly naked bodies covered in white makeup and the performers are in the 'red zone', which has scenographically severed all connection with our audience reality and any recognisable daily reality. Amongst other things what I call 'disguised' clownesque actions are performed, in that a number of actions are presented, which reference clown practices both explicitly and obliquely. For example, at one point a white heart-shaped balloon is suspended above the stage, and one of the performers laboriously crosses the stage, and then punctures it with a knife. What looks like milk gushes out of it, pouring over the performer, who falls over, repeatedly slipping in the liquid each time she attempts to get up, provoking an uneasy and partial laughter. This works because

the audience pretends that theatrical violence is not real, but then continually undercuts the pretence, with the result that, although we laugh, we are continually pausing to assess that laughter, asking ourselves why and at what we are laughing. Although *Red Zone* is not explicitly political, by playing with the collisions between a variety of overt and disguised clown practices, it presents a puzzling mix of real and unreal violent slapstick, leading the audience to grapple with their relationship to staged and real violence. It was telling that in the men's toilets after the show the normally discreet and silent act of pissing, avoiding the gaze of the other, was interrupted by men of all ages coming in loudly airing their views on the show: 'What the fuck was that?' 'Weird', 'Brilliant!' 'Shit...'

In contrast, the performance of Mik and Mak plays with the reality of violence and slapstick in a very different way. As they enter they are instantly recognisable as a traditional clown duo, their respective statuses are apparent, and the relationship between the Whiteface and the Auguste is immediately embodied and established, hence clear. The audience expects certain codified behaviour appropriate to a comedy duo, including making us laugh. In common with many other clowns from Russia they wear the costume and makeup, the motley, of the clown, although, again, like other contemporary Russian clowns, such as Litsedei, Mimirichy and Slava Polunin, there is a quality of deliberation about the motley. The motley is a recognisable mask signifying clown, whose fixity paradoxically allows them to play with their practice and status, subverting our expectations of that practice. They both have long batons, with which they fight each other. The batons are clearly foam rubber and it is evident and usual that the clown (Mik) with the higher status may hit the Auguste (Mak) by right, whereas Mak may only hit back by invitation. The violence is ritualised and recognisable, and the repetition does provoke our laughter, both despite and because of its traditional feel. The duo pause and Mak slowly and deliberately moves from the ring into the audience with his baton, pausing before selected audience members, and then tapping them with his baton very gently, almost imperceptibly, on the head. Each time he enquires, 'painful?' and then answers his own question, 'no painful'. The disjunction between expectation and result is what makes us laugh. The violence towards the audience is hardly even violence yet there is contact and threat. Simon Critchley in *On Humour* puts it very neatly: 'Humour is produced by the experience of the felt incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and

what actually takes place in the joke, gag, jest or blague' (2002: 3). He proceeds very slowly and then returns to the stage. Mik produces a large custard pie, and hands it to Mak who pauses, surveys the audience, and starts to move from the stage into the audience. This is a big threat, and, although there is initially a big laugh, it becomes nervous and anxious. The custard pie has many significations, not least that of the receiver of the pie being made to look foolish, which, in clownesque terms, is significantly worse than physical violence. However, before he reaches the audience Mak trips and falls face first into the pie. The audience laughter is layered: with relief; with recognition that they have been fooled; and with self-consciousness because the gag is ancient and yet we still laugh. We laugh at ourselves for laughing and at our pretension that we are above laughing at this obvious, although unexpected, gag. However, the clown lies face down in the pie for an inordinately long time, and the tenor of the audience laughter slowly changes: from a chuckle, to a pause, to laughter at the temerity of keeping the audience in suspense, to nervous laughter again and finally to silence, concern and guilt that the clown might be really hurt. Of course, the clown eventually gets up unhurt, and there is a laugh of relief and embarrassment at the recognition that he had been pretending all along and that we had been fooled again. He proceeds slowly into the audience with the remnants of the pie, pausing from time to time in front of someone, and places a tiny amount of pie on his nose, and then blows it off, before gently placing a tiny amount on the audience member's nose, waiting to see whether they will join in the game. Again there is repetition of 'painful', 'no painful', and the different audience reactions cause laughter, until eventually he returns to the ring, and stands next to Mik, both looking out at the audience. Quickly, Mik produces his baton, hits Mak over the head, who collapses. Mik picks him up, throws him over his shoulder, and starts to leave. As he does so Mak raises his head and says, 'painful', and immediately collapses again as they exit.

I noted above that Critchley (2002) discusses the use of disjunction of expectation in comedy, but both the almost opposing theories of Bergson (1956) and Wyndham Lewis (1982) provide helpful lenses through which to view clown violence, and in turn helped to find a way of playing the clown-bouffon in the production. In Bergson's lengthy essay, first published in 1900, he theorises that what makes us laugh is the person behaving like a thing or puppet. As he writes, '...our central image - something mechanical encrusted upon something

living' (1956: 97). He expatiates upon numerous comedy mechanisms, one of which is the use of repetition as a means to laughter which Mik and Mak adopt, and which is evident throughout *King Ubu*. Furthermore, the makeup and costume adopted by the clowns, not only signal clown, triggering recognition and therefore laughter, but, do indeed dehumanise the clown and turn the human into a puppet, which combined with an apparent bodily awkwardness does create the impression of 'thingness' which is both comic and frightening. The audience is permitted to kick the clown, as the clown is a thing to be kicked. Yet there is also the sense in that audience members are manipulated by the clowns, so they themselves become mechanical in their responses to the provocations, causing the rest of the audience to laugh at their 'thingness'. The kickers are also puppets. This accords with the reasoning of Wyndham Lewis who, in contrast to Bergson, proposes, in his 1927 short essay *The Meaning of the Wild Body* that 'The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person' (1982:158; italics in original). He goes on to state that '... all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things*, or physical bodies behaving as *persons*' (1982:158; italics in original). As Critchley explains, this is very subtle, as the conclusion is that 'It is not so much a person behaving like a thing or *vice versa* that is the root of the comic, but rather - surprise, surprise – *a person acting as a person* (2002: 59). The audience is acting like persons in wanting to kick, as are the clowns in wanting to be kicked. Underneath the 'slap' are persons doing real and accidental actions, because, although we are not our bodies, we have our bodies which are not subject to our will, however highly trained. Whilst there is no evidence for this, it does seem to me that, consciously or unconsciously, Bergson, Freud and Lewis must have been influenced by Jarry in their thinking on comedy.

Clown Practices for *Ubu*

So much for the theory, I shall now turn to reflect upon the practice of rehearsing the clowning in *King Ubu*. This had three stages – teaching clown practices; directing particular clown scenes; and taking an overview of the clown dramaturgy, and the relationship between clown and bouffon elements. In the first stage I took on the role of clown teacher. I ran two

day long workshops in clowning for the cast and production team. This included students, prisoners, as well as director, producer and education officer. In my second role I sat in on rehearsals as clown director for specific scenes. As clown teacher I did take on the role of expert, and started with the Lecoq inspired method of teaching clown, placing great emphasis on openness, play and complicity, with each person attempting to find their own clown. Whilst this was primarily a practical workshop aiming to free up clown play, I occasionally made reference to the practices of Derevo and Mik and Mak, and emphasised that the play has a complicated relationship with violence and melodrama. In the first session, which took place in the Prison chapel, an institution within an institution, the actors were trying too hard to clown, and not playing freely. I myself put on the red nose and improvised as clown. This improvisation led me to pick up the altar cloth and put it round my shoulders as a shawl. This playfully transgressive act lightened the atmosphere and gave permission to the clowns to play. This simple demonstration of clowning said much more than any amount of analysis of clown practices could achieve. Here I was doubling the roles of teacher and clown as I was both the representative of the institution, the insider, who was saying that it was OK to transgress, and the outsider, the fool, who does not know, and is perhaps not even aware of, the rules of the institution. Later on in the workshop, one of the prisoners remarked, apropos of the exercises, that there was a lot of clowning going on here, and I responded, ‘Yes, look at all the prison officers, although they don’t know they are’, which effectively released the tension, but also hinted that we are all clowns, even if accidentally. I am not claiming that these improvisations were particularly inspired, but these tiny yet affirmative acts of clown play cut through the regulative processes of the prison.

In the second workshop we worked on clown status and structure, especially the ‘classic’ clown trio as I have outlined in Chapter Two. Whilst at this stage I did not use the text I placed it in the context of the play, noting that there are many examples of the trio in many scenes throughout the play, for example, Pa Ubu, Ma Ubu, and Billikins. What I did not do with the cast was attempt to explore the characters as realistic figures, who possessed psychological motivation and intention, which Jarry himself was at pains to avoid as he outlines in his *A Letter to Lugne Poe* (2002: xxi-xxii). I went so far as to maintain that the play could be understood as a series of clown entrées about power, even if there is retribution at the end.

Annie McKean had rewritten the ending of her adaptation so that the police arrive to arrest Pa Ubu, and the audience vote on whether he should be sent to prison or set free. It was during this workshop that I mentioned, very much in passing, that I have seen some clown troupes, such as Mimirichy, who, through their clowning were complicit with their audiences in conveying a portrait of their repressive society, and I asked the actors to consider how a clown might play a police officer. I noted also that the irony of prisoners playing clown police was not lost on them. Although my reading of the play as a series of clown-bouffon routines is contentious, clearly the play is a beautiful gigantic raspberry blown at all authority and morality, and is usually played in a deliberately cartoon fashion. Nevertheless the exaggeration means that the spectator reads the play as both a harmless pantomime and as an amoral fable about power. Innes makes a bolder claim which, in the context of the prison, is almost impossible to practice. He maintains that ‘The nihilism is so anarchic that it discredits itself - ...’ (1993: 25), but then states:

...the staging for *Ubu Roi* should be understood: a contradictory synthesis of incongruity, liberating the imagination by the unusual juxtaposition of everyday objects, and simultaneously offering an alternative universe in which everything is possible: ... (1993: 26)

Phew!

In a discussion with some of the prisoners afterwards about the clown practices they noted the subversive nature of the play and how it related to their situation, however in a wider sense, they saw acting in plays or putting on the Christmas cabaret as a carnivalesque act. It was an escape from the strictures, routines and timetables of the institution. In a discussion with several of them, one also commented upon clownesque behaviour as a mechanism for survival in the extremely regulated prison life, saying that they constantly clowned around in prison, because it takes the strain off things (Prisoner A 2007). The others concurred and added examples of this behaviour, which ranged from horseplay, for example pulling another prisoner’s elasticated trousers down, to jokes and irony. During rehearsal, one prisoner, for example, mentioned that if the governor didn’t come to the performance he personally would ‘go round and have a little word with him’ (Prisoner B 2007). But clown is not the only

mechanism for survival of course. During breaks in rehearsals I observed prisoners smoking by the iron bars of the gate that served as an exit to the gym. They could just get their hand out through the bars and a foot out underneath. This was freedom.

It is impossible for me to fully understand the situation of the prisoners, although I was a participant observer. But I was in the prison for a specific purpose so I only saw a small slice of the institution: many locked gates, walls topped with barbed wire, a gymnasium which served as a rehearsal space for actors, weights room for prisoners working out, and a performance arena. In effect then, I was the naïve in the prison, who did not understand the rules of the game, although I carried with me a safety net. I was part of what is an everyday situation for me: making, teaching and learning performance and what's more I could leave at the end of each session.

Between the Gates (after Franz Kafka):

T went through the gate and pulled it shut behind him. Its clang reverberated in the quiet of the morning. In front of him was another gate with no handle and through the bars of this second gate T could see a courtyard, and around that a high smooth wall with a rounded top. There was no-one in the courtyard. He could just make out another smaller gate, solid this time, with a tiny circular window in it, on which the pale sunlight flashed.

Placing his hands firmly on the bars of his gate T peered through, moving his head as far into the gap as he could. He could get his nose between the bars, and part of his cheeks, but not his whole head. In any case his ears stuck out too much, one of the things his mates used to tease him about at school. The air smelt sweeter here, and he noticed that the courtyard had a layer of white sand covering its rough surface; there were no footprints in the sand. If he twisted his head to the right he could just make out a small artificial pond, surrounded by reeds. T supposed they must be real, although there must be special soil

to give the pond the appearance of a tiny wilderness, or perhaps they were uprooted every night by a gardener and brought back in the morning. There were two ducks swimming on the pond, and while he watched, one of them stopped swimming, got out, and waddled over towards him. The duck halted about two metres away and looked at T. It did not come any further although it could easily have slipped through the bars. Why would it come anyway? T had no bread to offer it and he did not especially want a duck to share his little space between the gates. This thought immediately made him feel hungry and he realised that he had eaten nothing since breakfast and it was now nearly noon. Although it was a warm spring day, almost hot, with a clear blue sky, and he could stay here quite comfortably until somebody came, or at least until nightfall when they must make their rounds, he would like some food and a cup of coffee. If the worst came to the worst there was space to lie down although the concrete would be quite hard but bearable.

He withdrew his head from between the bars, and felt the press of the metal on his cheeks, a warm glow, almost as though his face had been slapped. T stepped back and considered what to do. He looked up and saw that there was a CCTV camera pointing down at him. So someone knew of his presence here at any rate and perhaps they had seen him looking through the bars. He tried to think over what he had done whilst waiting and whether any of it could be used against him, and felt his cheeks grow hotter. Surely there was nothing that could be pinned on him? Or would looking at a duck count against him if the worst came to the worst? It was difficult to tell; in one sense anything could be used for or against someone, depending on how they looked at it. They looked at it quite differently from you anyway. For you it was quite normal, nothing important, just looking at

a duck, but they might see looking at a duck in a different light – as something to be suspicious of. But perhaps there was no-one there to look at any footage of him, so he was in the clear. On the other hand it might be better if they had seen him, and he could take the consequences, pay his Debt to Society as the newspapers liked to phrase it, and then he could continue on his way with a clear conscience. As he was thinking this a rasping voice started up in the air, quite quiet and quite indistinct, ‘State your business with us and we shall see’. T had to strain to hear. Why couldn’t they speak up? After all science could do many wonderful and complicated things nowadays and this was child’s play. But he looked around nervously as he thought it. ‘I repeat state your business please’. T stared through the gate at the solid door with the circular window at the other end of the courtyard. ‘I just want to get out of this space and through that gate and on’. ‘Ah, you want to get in. It was assumed that you wanted to get out...then proceed’. The gate in front of him shuddered open and he stepped into the courtyard; T noticed the duck was now back swimming on the pond.

The second and third stages of my practical involvement in the project were synthesised in that I assumed the role of director of the clowning during rehearsals, focussing on the delivery of the text where appropriate, for example, unpicking the nuances of the text, (as in the previous example I used above), as well as directing the embodiment of the text by the actors. This included detailing the movement, timing and play with the masks. The production team had agreed that the actors would, in the main, wear half masks, based on *commedia* masks, and much time was spent on playing with the masks. There were several reasons why the decision was made to use masks. Firstly, amongst other proposals for an anti-realist dramaturgy and scenography, Jarry himself suggested using masks in his *Of the Futility of the ‘Theatrical’ in the Theatre*:

The actor should use a mask to envelope his head, thus replacing it by the effigy of the CHARACTER. His mask should not follow the masks in the Greek theatre to indicate simply tears or laughter, but should indicate the nature of the character: the Miser, the Waverer, the covetous man accumulating crimes... (2002: xxvi)

Jarry continues this passage with detailed and clear instructions as to how to play in the mask, and the use of masks was appropriate to the tone of the production. Secondly, there were basic practical reasons for using the masks, in that, since all the main characters were played by the male prisoners then Ma Ubu, could be played by a man, swapping characters quite easily, and Pa Ubu was played by two actors, to represent different although still non-realistic characteristics – ‘nice’ Ubu and ‘nasty’ Ubu. Also the mask, as with the clown nose, whose functions I discussed in Chapter Two, does provide a style of embodied playing for the actor which fits the play. Their use distances the audience from identification with characters, but yet establishes a complicit relationship with the audience, especially as the mask has to play out towards the audience. Finally, and most important for my thinking about how to synthesise the practices of the clown and bouffon, the half masks, which inhabited a space somewhere between them, and yet were also reminiscent of *commedia dell’arte* masks, went some way to solving the dilemma of real/unreal violence I outlined previously. Here my role moved from that of teacher as expert in charge, to that of collaborator, interpreter and guide with the actors. Moreover, I was in a subservient relationship as assistant to the overall director, who was in his final year of the BA Drama programme. And in some sense I was also the student, learning how to adapt to and gently challenge the regulatory system of the institution of the prison.

At a late stage in our rehearsals we agreed that we needed a linking device to further connect the text to the audience, especially as we needed to counter the distancing effect and rhythm of the masks. I was mindful of McManus’s observation (2003: 14) that the figure of the clown can step out of the fictional world of the play and into the real world of the audience. This would also explode the monologic institution of the play performed at the audience and help make it a dialogic conversation with the audience. Annie McKean felt that a Boalean joker figure would be appropriate, and after much discussion this morphed into a jester

character who had a threefold role: he could fill in the missing links of the adaptation, ask the audience their opinion of the events, and keep the play moving swiftly along. This character also synthesised elements of both clown and bouffon, which the production required. It was extremely fortunate that the prisoner who was assigned the role was an excellent trained dancer, actor and improviser as well as being a natural clown. He spent a great deal of time writing his links as rhyming couplets. In a nod to Brechtian alienation he was also furnished with a jester puppet who questioned the audience about the morality of the adaptation. To continue rehearsing the actor took the puppet back to his cell each night to rehearse and develop his part. The puppet became the source of a secret running joke between us all. Would the officers wonder where the new prisoner had come from? Would the puppet be given meals and work detail? Would the puppet have to exchange his jester's costume for prison sweatshirt and tracksuit bottoms?



The jester and his friend

These jokes, as much as other practices, provided a conduit for release and created a strongly collaborative atmosphere. They also became a means for me to reference a basic

method for play which, as so often happens with clown practices, the performers abandon in the serious business of rehearsal. The performers will play beautifully in warm-ups and games but as soon as they pick up their scripts they become tense and forget their audience; they forget to metaphorically pull each others tracksuit bottoms down. This may well be because the director wants to impose a sense of seriousness and that the actors, even professional actors, treat the text as sacrosanct. In the foreword to *Why is that so Funny?* the performer Toby Jones writes about how it is common practice today for directors to start a rehearsal with games and ball games, but, after twenty minutes or so, this stops, the actors sit down and pick up their scripts (Jones 2007: ix). There is collusion between actors and director that the text is a serious object and that the director is a shamanistic figure who will unlock its mysteries with the actors. In the project it was vital that this was subverted through clownesque play. And in fact throughout the rehearsal process and in the performances the performers, specially the prisoners, often did find a playfulness with the text and for the realisation of that text. This included devising specific songs and slapstick which the prisoners themselves created and rehearsed, exploding the Jarry adaptation, but also a more basic but stronger improvisatory impulse, that of fooling about, which allowed the actors to free themselves from what they perceived as the tyranny of the text. This was very much a question of ‘Let those that play your clowns do what is not set down for them. Don’t do that unless you have to...’ In performance the actors found a further dimension of play, as they performed with and to their audience, none more so than the prisoner who played the jester figure. During one performance he was heckled by another prisoner in the audience, and he immediately responded in rhyming couplets which he had improvised on the spot.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2007), the philosopher Jacques Rancière, maintains, with reference to Plato’s *Republic* (1993), that there have always been and still are those who are outside the *polis* and therefore are unable to participate in the processes of decision making in a democracy. It is not that they cannot speak, although they may not be permitted to speak, but that they do not speak in the right ways; therefore they cannot be heard and so are ignored. Whilst this may perhaps seem rather over dramatic for my own situation, underneath the identifiable voices, is an obscure and faint voice which can only just be made out. This is the invisible clown who is still attempting to adapt to the practices and procedures of the

institutions in which he practices. He really does find them alien and perplexing, head-scratchingly alien and perplexing. Yet he can be ignored as he really doesn't speak a language which is at all recognisable in the institution. Occasionally the voice becomes stronger and breaks through for a short while or is permitted to speak up, but is then pushed back to where it can be ignored again. It is noted that he is harmless, nevertheless in microscopic ways there has been some change through the play of the clown.

Play, improvisation, le jeu, complicity: this nexus of clownesque ingredients, so weighty and so simple, requiring many years of practice to master, although it can never be mastered or understood except through doing, practice, incorporation, and even then you realise how little you know, became the vital tools in unlocking the subversion which reveals the cracks in the prison, for in a predominantly regulative institution where everything is prescribed and most things are proscribed, where routine is the order of the day and the order of the day is routine, then spontaneity is a hugely transgressive act. Put aside criticality about whether spontaneity, being in the now, is possible. The basic clownesque practices I have described here gave the prisoners, and students and Annie and I a means to challenge the practices of the prison, not through protest but through slipping momentarily out of the chains of cause and effect, of time, of the planned. The unplanned and playful becomes a political tool, and bridges the gap between the Lecoq clown and the Fo clown, between the real violence and the pretend violence. *King Ubu* holds two fingers up to authority, excellent, but improvisation which is scarcely noticed but nevertheless sensed, does so too. I may be accused of an idealised notion of the freedom and of the power of the clown, and it is true that the stability of the institution will reassert itself, if it ever felt the breath of challenge, but at bottom the role of the clown at HMP West Hill was messing about. I continually return to Frost and Yarrow's assertion about clown play with which I began this thesis (you really don't need me to reference it do you? You do? Oh alright then, if I must. Look I can't be bothered, really I can't, you must know it by now), and now feel its full impact and truth: that play is the most important strategy to challenge power. No wonder those in whom power has vested authority, for example, prison officers, feel threatened by the spontaneous. Oh yes, they may laugh and pretend to enjoy the project, and there are studies and papers on the value of laughter, but you know that deep down they, and I really don't need to tell you who they are, feel deeply scared. It's because in Steve

Linser's words 'A clown is a poet who is also an orang-utan' (cited by Townsen 1976: no page number).

Chapter Five: FOOLING HAMLET

January 1990, directing Circus Troupe, No 2 Theatre Co. One morning, as a warm up exercise, I asked them to devise a clown version of *Hamlet*. Since none of them knew the play I had to paraphrase it for them. This was an interesting exercise for me too, which went something like: Hamlet sees the ghost of his father who tells him that he was murdered by his Uncle Claudius to become the King. He marries Hamlet's mother. Hamlet gets a bit upset and broods on this. He meets some performers, and asks them to add a bit which will reveal the truth when they perform. They agree. He also gives the professionals an acting lesson (laughter.) During the performance of the play, The Mousetrap, (laughter) Claudius gets agitated and yells for light etc etc... I won't bore you. I then quoted a few bits I could remember off the top of my head: To be or not to be that is the question. What is this quintessence of dust? Very like a whale. Alas Poor Yorick. Here's Rosemary for thee. 'Tis bitter cold and I am sick at heart.

When I was fourteen my English teacher, Brian 'Alfie' Bass, paraphrased Hamlet for us in much the same way. He didn't tell us it was Hamlet, so it sounded very exciting, like an Agatha Christie thriller, like The Mousetrap. He didn't tell us that it was funny though, but you can't have everything. There were quite a few clowns in the class and I reckon that if he had suggested a clown *Hamlet* there would have been a lot of takers.

Beginnings

Bumbling through the previous chapter has been the ghost of the clown trying to find ways of registering dissent, and it appears that the clown can be effective in registering dissent in the

most regulative of institutions. The focus of this chapter is on a practice based research project exploring the ways in which diverse clown practices are used both by students and me in a much less regulative institution: the University of Winchester. The practices of the University are not the antithesis of the prison, but as I discussed in the previous chapter the University, like most other academic institutions is a combination of regulative, normative and the cultural-cognitive pillars. It places a great emphasis on committee structures, consultation and negotiation with all staff and students, its stakeholders, to give it its current denomination, in its decision making processes. All stakeholders have at least a consultative say in the management of its processes, practices and decisions¹⁶. The main question I shall explore in this chapter is that, given that the practices of such an institution are broadly liberal and democratic, how might the practices of the clown play with, reveal, subvert, and highlight those processes? To do this I shall focus on a specific module on which I have taught from 2004-9: the first year BA Drama module *Popular Traditions*. Over this time this module has provided me with the opportunity to document and analyse my own, colleagues and students approaches to the clown in the institution. In this module students are introduced to Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque drawn from *Rabelais and His World* (1984) and are asked to collaboratively devise a carnivalesque performance using an early modern play as source material. From 2006 one of the selected core texts has been *Hamlet* (2006). The play has been chosen for a number of reasons: it is a great tragedy and a canonical text, ripe for clownesque fooling; many critics and academics have claimed that Shakespeare has become a cultural institution and the epitome of the cultural industry, particularly in the UK (Dollimore and Sinfield 1994). *Hamlet* is perhaps the greatest exemplar of these practices, and therefore fits the focus of this project. As Alan Sinfield observes in his essay 'Give an account of Shakespeare and Education, showing why you think they are effective and what you have appreciated about them. Support your comments with precise references' (Sinfield 1994:158 – 181), the study of Shakespeare in formal educational contexts, particularly schools, has tended to regard his plays as the pinnacle of literature and to judge students' critical ability and attainment according to their understanding of his plays. Sinfield argues that this critical understanding is not neutral, but is deeply biased; there is the assumption that his plays

¹⁶ I am aware that this claim might be contested by those groups within the university who would consider themselves marginalised, for example, those on the far left of the union, amongst others.

‘embody universal truths’ (1994:159). The view of the world presented by this reading of the plays is that of a rigid and hierarchical culture, and is the product of a dominant conservative culture, which rewrites the past to reinvent the present. Sinfield maintains that there are other appropriations of Shakespeare however:

It is partly a matter of reading them differently – drawing attention to their historical assertion, their political implications, and the activity of criticism in reproducing them. ... And it is also a matter of changing the way Shakespeare signifies in society; he does not have to be a crucial stage in the justification of elitism in education and culture. He has been appropriated for certain practices and attitudes, and can be reappropriated for others (1994:161).

This is in accordance with a key aim of the module: to demonstrate that Shakespeare drew on popular forms, and that his plays, even his serious tragedies, are infused with elements of clowning, *commedia dell’arte* and carnival, and, as the *Popular Traditions* module description states, ‘to explore a dialectic between the popular and the dominant...’ (2004). I myself am a product of a rigid and hierarchical educational system, in which Shakespeare was most certainly approached through the literary, the high, and the dominant, both in the school and in examinations, so I personally have taken great pleasure in teaching a module in which playing with and subverting Shakespeare is a requirement, and I have often been impressed and awed by the energy which students bring to the task of appropriating the material for their own versions of the text. Yet it is important to bear in mind that since Sinfield wrote the above, creative responses to Shakespeare have become much more common in educational institutions and in productions in the UK (see Purcell 2009). However it could be argued that this is simply a way of educational institutions and theatre companies making Shakespeare palatable for students or audiences. Popularising Shakespeare has become part of the ‘cultural industry’, a guarantee of ticket sales and cultural provenance. The dominant reasserts itself by permitting and even encouraging messing about with Shakespeare. Implicit throughout this chapter is the consideration that, because the clown’s play is permitted and even encouraged, ostensibly the subversion is less evident, as there is little against which the clown can kick. Unlike the rigid practices of the prison, discussed in the previous chapter,

where any and all play by the clown reveals the gaps in the institution, the provocations by the clown in the University have to be more subtle and more specific and yet paradoxically broader and more obvious.

This has not always been the case however. In a Radio 4 series *Turn Over Your Papers Now* (2010), which surveyed different forms of examination in the UK education system, the historian Christopher Stray, described how, until the eighteenth century, the oral examination was the usual method of examining students at the Universities of both Oxford and Cambridge. He discussed how all the students would be grouped in the examination hall, and would have to argue, discuss and defend their subject for their finals. A clown figure would act as master of ceremonies for the examination. The role of the clown was not to keep order but to create chaos, provoke argument and dissent and stir up debate. Stray related how the clown would frequently tear up the candidates papers and notes, overturn desks, and was, in general, a lord of misrule. Eventually, as Stray noted, the clown's interventions became too anarchic, the institution felt that the examination required seriousness and order, and the clown's role was dropped in the late seventeenth century. What this fascinating anecdote does demonstrate is that the clown play was positively encouraged by the academy, but that there is a limit to that play, and once the limit is transgressed the clown is banished from the exam. What it does also reveal is how the role of the clown calls into question the actual processes of examination nowadays. The practice of the clown implicitly questions why examinations in academic institutions are conducted in silence and with due seriousness.

The *Hamlet* project has been an important element of my larger project exploring how clown practices may be employed within different institutions. In Chapter One I discussed and problematised Trimingham's methodology for practice as research (2002) and considered a range of creative clown practices in different contexts. This methodology has been key to the understanding of my own clown practices, and it is useful to sketch how the methodology has been applied to the actual practices by both me and the students on the module. Theoretical lectures and seminars are delivered during the module, contextualising and historicising carnival, and exploring *Hamlet* as both a vehicle for clown play and as a text which in itself contains many examples of the clownesque. I shall consider my reading of the

play in more depth later in this chapter. Alongside the theoretical underpinning, practical workshops on clown, *commedia dell'arte* and, from 2007, circus and puppetry, have been delivered by me and other practitioner/teachers¹⁷. Throughout the project I have increasingly felt that I have been so immersed in my own practice and that I have not had the opportunity to be a researcher outside the practice with the result that I have not been able to have any distance from my practice. So in 2009 I asked a colleague and expert clown, John Lee, with whom I have worked on several projects (see, for example, my account of *The Misguided Tour* in the section 'Three's Company', in Chapter Two of this study), to teach the clowning, which provided me with the opportunity to observe another's practice and enabled me to view students' responses to another's teaching. This was a turning point in my understanding of clown practices within the institution and resulted in the realisation that there has been a shift in my role from that of teacher and director of clown to a role more akin to that of dramaturg, as described by Synne Berhndt and Cathy Turner in their book *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2008). This move away from clown performer, and even director of clown, as I was in *Ubu the King*, is not a completely new role for me, as when I was Course Director of the Academy of Circus Arts from 1992-1996 I was, at various times, performer, director, teacher and dramaturg of student work, and was the dramaturg for the entire student circus show, creating a narrative with the already existing circus acts. But from 2000 when I started teaching at the University of Winchester my clown practice has increasingly developed away from clown performer to that of clown enabler of others' performance. I shall consider this developing role in the conclusion to this chapter, and explore it further in Chapter Six, 'The Dramaturg Clown', in which I use a practice based project in 2009, *The Village Fete*, produced by Fuse Performance, as a focus to explore my formal role of dramaturg.

The delivery of both theory and practice in the *Popular Traditions* module attempts to seek a creative tension between both elements, which is intended to give rise to a fruitful and developed exploratory research process by the students. However it is often difficult to maintain a balance between them, since often students (and sometimes lecturers) in the performing arts in Higher Education perceive a binary between the practitioner-teacher and the

¹⁷ I shared the teaching with other colleagues, including Rob Conkie, Stephen Hall, Alexandra Hoare, Nigel Luck, Paul Murray, and Penny Patrick. I ran practical workshops in both basic clowning and *commedia*.

researcher-teacher, although all the teachers on the module have been keen to privilege neither one. The tutors have agreed that we should serve as examples to students of a range of varying roles and positions, both theoretical and practical. Conceptually this sounds rather too neat, and in practice I acknowledge that there are difficulties for me, for in order to be able to do both, my actual clown practice has tended to ignore the Shakespearean scholar. I myself am a teacher, who is also a clown practitioner, and this project has involved me in several different and conflicting roles: as teacher of clowning; as explicator of a 'difficult' text; as supervisor of student practice; as mentor of students' research; as a marker and therefore judge of student performance and written assessments; and as a student myself, researching the clown practices and how they might relate to a great tragedy. Since I also am researching the text, and am placing my own reading upon it, subjectivity and objectivity are enmeshed within my roles as practitioner, academic, teacher, researcher and student. There are further tensions between my institutional roles as an expert in the area of clown practice and of *Hamlet*, and as the aforementioned student and scholar who is himself in a process of discovery and uncertainty, of wavering and delay. The creative tensions between the demands placed upon the teacher/practitioner by the requirements of the institution and its subversion by clown practices, with its implication that the clown needs, and possibly delights in, the institution against which to play, are fundamental to this chapter.

Additionally, there is my recognition that *Hamlet* itself is an institution, with an enormous weight of scholarly study and history attached to the text, as well as having a place in popular imagination as a great play. One obvious but important role I assume is that, as representative of the institution, I, along with the other teachers, do give permission to students to be creative with the text, to clown it. In this role, I delve into the text in order to read it again, to plunder it for quotes appropriate to a clownesque version. On the other hand there are many times when the clown is thrown out of the ring, and I am only too happy to play the scholar, when, mole like, I burrow into the text and other explanatory texts, throwing up great mounds of earth, and get enormous pleasure from being seen as an expert on the play, on being asked about it, discussing it. And yet perhaps this is also a clown role – that of the clown playing the scholar, a twenty-first century counterpart to the 'wise fool' of Shakespeare (Bate 2000:18). The contradictions, wavering and self-indulgence in my approach need to be

borne in mind, although I am comforted by Bate's assertion in his essay, *Shakespeare's Foolosophy*, that, 'The bifurcation between the study of ideas and that of performance, between theory and practice, would have puzzled Shakespeare himself' (2000: 17). It is my contention that the role of dramaturg clown brings all these different theoretical and practical elements together.

This synthesis of theory and practice results in an assessment of a student devised performance, in which theories of carnival and of a clown *Hamlet* are embedded in that performance and embodied by the students. This conforms to Trimingham's paradigm of practice as 'A spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding' (2002: 56). Although in such an intensively delivered single module it is not possible to introduce students to an in-depth survey of the complexities of practice as research as a methodology, nor are they explicitly introduced to the idea that the performance is an outcome of a research focus, nevertheless students are encouraged to explore the ways in which their research around the text and into carnival practically informs their practice. For example, the lecture on Bakhtin and carnival was immediately followed by a devising task in which students had to apply the theory to a scene of their choice from *Hamlet*. Moreover in discussions students do recognise that the lectures and seminars on carnival and clown have enabled them to understand the ways in which they may carnivalise the text. As a student stated, '...and I think you need to have these older classical pieces to be able to contrast with the modern pieces to actually get an understanding of how drama and theatre has evolved over the years and where it's come from' (Gill 2009).

Enter the clowns, followed by the anti-clowns...

Although *Hamlet* may be contextualised in various clownesque ways, which I shall discuss later in this chapter, a major focus is on the ways that the play itself is a vehicle for clownesque performance, that is, to be parodied. The text is perceived therefore as a living document to be pulled apart, played with, exploded and reinvented, and the paper and words which make up the brick of a book entitled *Hamlet* are there to serve as a starting point for devising a performance however they may choose. At this basic level the practices of the

clown open up a creative and playful comedic subversion of the view of Shakespeare as the ultimate example of high art, and the bestower of cultural capital. Yet as an assessment, whose criteria need to be met, there is also a constriction and limit on what students may do, although the framework of assessment does provide a focus, and in actuality the devised performances can take many forms. As an example of this creative clowning, in a rehearsal in 2009 a group consisting of eight students chose to focus on a single speech, each of them burlesquing the performance of *Hamlet*, in a different way. (Dear Reader, I am sure you can guess the speech I am referring to, can't you?) One, a particularly good mimic, played him as David Bowie, another as a pompous actor, a third as a very angry Hamlet, and so on. Each character began the speech very seriously and soberly, but was interrupted in a number of clownesque ways: forgetting the lines and needing a prompt; their trousers falling down; stopping and saying that they did not have the slightest idea of what 'he's going on about'; singing as though auditioning for the *X Factor*, entering and, on seeing the audience, becoming entranced by them and being ushered off without saying a word; and finally a groan-inducing exchange between a macho Hamlet, who took off his shirt, to reveal rabbits drawn on his chest, at which the whole troupe stopped and one of the other eight Hamlets asked, 'What are those?' 'Rabbits!' 'Rabbits??' 'Yes, rabbits!!' 'Rabbits???' 'Yes...rabbits...but they look like hairs from a distance'. (Actually, I gave them this joke, nicked in 1982, which we used in Zippo and Co, when Stix the musician and drummer took off his shirt to prepare for his drum solo, which was immediately stopped. I believe we nicked it from a child who told us the joke after a show, but anyway we all agreed that it was suitably Shakespearian. This joke disappeared from the final student performance. They do have some standards). Thus, although it is a requirement that some remnants of the text need to be used, the devising process by the clowns opened up the text to a wide range of interpretations, presentations and meanings, which my former colleague, Rob Conkie, who has used this module and other performances as case studies in an article, has called the 'instances of popular or democratized Shakespeare' (2004: 179). He writes:

So what is democratized and contested in these performances?
One answer lies in the way the texts are approached. The
condensing of the plays into twenty minutes means that that only a
few actual lines, if any, survive into the improvised versions of the
'originals' (2004: 181).

The term ‘popular’ in relationship to performance is difficult to define. Nor is it any easier to define through particular examples of popular performance. In his book *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (2009) Stephen Purcell spends some time in analysing the term (pp. 8- 26). He writes:

‘Popular theatre’ is one of those terms that can easily be taken for granted. What it describes would seem to be self-evident: theatre that is ‘popular’. Try to define what constitutes ‘popular’ however and things start to become unstuck. That the same term might just as easily be applied to *Starlight Express* as to storytelling, to Bernard Manning as to Dario Fo, to mummers’ plays as to bedroom farces, indicates that the label implies no shared political standpoint or stylistic features, no audience demographic, nor any particular measure of commercial success (2009:8).

He follows this with a wide-ranging review of the ways in which the term has been used by practitioners and academics over the last seventy years. He includes particular discussion of the writing and practice of Peter Brook, Joel Schecter, Bertolt Brecht, Stuart Hall, Robert Weimann and John McGrath. Purcell focuses on the basic distinction between theatre which is ‘commercially ‘popular’ (‘populist’)’ (2009:10) and theatre which is ‘... ‘popular’ in this sense stems more directly from its Latin ancestor *populus* (‘the people’) implying a theatre of the people, speaking to them in their own idioms, voicing their own concerns, representing their own interests’ (2009:10). This was similar to the definition given by Tim Prentki, the original writer of the *Popular Traditions* module. He noted, in the context of discussing the concept of a ‘popular tradition’, ‘...for me what characterises a popular tradition is if at some level you can see it coming from the people...so there must be an element of counter in order, by my definition a popular tradition is counter cultural’ (Prentki 2009). Clearly the above example of student rehearsal I have given fits with the concept of popular as stemming from them and allowing them to challenge the elite view of Shakespeare as described by Sinfield. In his book on popular theatre, co-written with Jan Selman, *Popular Theatre in Political Culture* (2000) Prentki writes, ‘Popular Theatre is the practice of theatre as an expression of specific communities’ stories, issues, knowledge and needs (2000:8). Although the aims of the module are to challenge the dominant culture’s view of Shakespeare, the engagement with

the module does not spring from the students' own stories and interests but is imposed upon them and validated by the Drama programme, the University and an external panel of experts who agree that the study of Shakespeare is important. There is nothing inherently wrong with this of course; students do have to study something, and many do become very passionate about the module and the deconstruction of text, but the fact remains that the subject matter is institutionally prescribed for them rather than stemming from their own issues. Lanier suggests that, 'What makes popular culture *popular* is how it is used, not necessarily the size of the audience, its mass reproduction or its commerciality' (2002:50). This infers that popular culture is both imposed and comes from the people, and he goes on to argue that there are possibilities of resistance to the dominant (2002:51). I might add that in the case of the students' performances, the work is by them and for them and many of the references are representative of their enthusiasms and interests, as can be seen from the case above.

Most of the examples given of popular theatre, and much of the practical work that students make on the module, tend to focus on performances that are defined as 'rough' by Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* (1990), who maintains that a common factor of popular theatre forms is their 'roughness': 'Salt, sweat, noise, smell: the theatre that's not in a theatre, the theatre on carts, on wagons, on trestles, audiences standing, drinking....' (1990:73). Brook's images are vivid and redolent, but I would argue that they are not necessarily representative of 'rough' theatre. This is especially so when students take a much more exploratory approach to their use of *Hamlet* in devising the performance. Most student companies, as in the example above, do retain the characters of the play, although heavily parodied, and a linear plot, although very truncated. The snippets of text which are selected are included to support the telling of the story so that their audience can follow the play.

Occasionally a group of students have been much more radical in their textual and dramaturgical choices with the source material, and made a performance which only obliquely references the text and plot. The result is a performance which shuffles and dispenses with characters, narrative and interpretation, and where the snippets of text which survive are not framed as a linear retelling in the manner of a traditional piece of theatre. In these cases the performance outcome has not been immediately recognisable as *Hamlet* and moves away from

a performance of a piece of theatre to a performance which draws heavily on and intertwines other art forms, notably live art, installation and visual art. This approach requires a sophistication, experience, intention and daring for which most first year undergraduate students, as well as many professional performance companies of course, have neither the inclination nor the requisite expertise. When this works however the outcome is both memorable and insightful, and its lack of traditional form challenges the concept of 'popular'. A remarkable example occurred in 2008 when a group of female students made a stunning piece of site-based corporeal performance, in which, covered in body paint of different colours, they were entwined in a small grove of trees in the grounds of the campus by different coloured ropes. The audience could stand and move wherever and whenever they wanted; they could even leave if they chose, although no-one actually did, partly because the boundaries between theatre forms were deliberately blurred by the performers and partly because there was no indication of when the performance actually ended. The performers paused briefly at one point, and the audience assumed that it had ended, but then they started again, in what was presumably an endless recycle. Throughout the event the performers chanted, whispered, and sang fragments of text, overlaying it with calls and splashes of sound, meanwhile tangling and untangling themselves in the rope, like puppets, amid the trees and the spectators. Sometimes the movement was briefly in time, but almost as soon as that occurred, they broke the rhythms so that they were disjointed and out of synch. The time was out of joint. They presented a nearly invisible ghost of the play, which was carnivalesque in its deconstruction of text and narrative, as well as in its use of space and its relationship with the audience, who became complicit with the actors in a mysterious and poetic world of death, destruction and beauty. The members of the audience were immersed in the performance rather than spectating a performance.

Their piece extended the possibilities of clowning, beyond both a clownesque burlesque of the play and an interpretation of the play as a comedic text, and into a world in which their audience had to make a radical readjustment of the frames of reference of both the play and of clowning. It was an example of Stephen Knapper's concept of 'grotesque idealism' (2007: 138), to which I referred in Chapter One. Beautiful and unnerving, the piece was an excellent example of research whose performance outcome challenged the audience's assumptions

around clown and text, and asked the witnesses to the piece to consider whether for the clown to subvert and play with the text, the text is needed as a measure for the subversion. Was knowledge of the text and recognition of the fleeting and deliberately mangled references to the text necessary for an audience? Through its embodiment of the text and its provocations with the framework of the play, it subverted the complex, explicit and implicit practices and rules of the institution. It broke with the delineation of space between performer and audience, asking the audience to be in the performance, yet still remaining respectfully silent and watching, unlike the heckling at stand-up comedy. To do this the audience had to be versed in and recognise the unspoken rules of behaviour of an audience at a piece of theatre. This example of radical and creative clowning with the source material destabilised and further blurred the concept of popularising Shakespeare, as discussed by Sinfield, in that the performance required an audience who had strong knowledge of both the text and of contemporary performance forms for it to be appreciated, yet it still engaged in clownesque practices.

It was popular in the sense that it came from the group of students but it was specific to the cohort and their understanding of the demands of the module. It was site-specific in that it was created for a particular space, and, in turn, the space partly dictated the performance. It would not have worked had it been performed in the High Street in Winchester, and nor was it meant to. One of the practices of the educational institution is that it does ask students to challenge themselves, and develop their understanding of performance. By making this performance in a safe and secure environment, meant that the students were able to push the boundaries of form and content. This performance responded very creatively to the demands of the module to creatively play with concepts of 'high' and 'low', yet it also synthesised the binary between them, asking to be judged on its own terms.

It further problematised the complexities of what is defined as 'popular theatre'. In his discussion of 'popular' Purcell considers Brecht's use and understanding of 'popular theatre' (2009: 16-17). He concludes that, '...Brechtian theatre, unlike the single-level dogmatism of much agitprop, is in fact all about maintaining a plurality of meaning, and not so much didactic as *dialectic* (2009:17, italics in original). He compares this to Bakhtin on carnival:

‘Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque, in fact, also hinges upon a pluralism of this kind’ (2009: 17). In a microcosm of the demands of the institution the student is both a member of a collective and an individual, both inside and outside. This development of the concept of ‘popular’ performance to include different ways of exploring devising and performing, the outcomes of which allows the audience to relate to the performance on several levels at the same time, is very important for the sense of both criticality and immersion required of the audience members for the piece I have described above. The word ‘popular’ in the module *Popular Traditions* demands three linked but different ways of understanding and employing it. It acknowledges and asks students to practically use the popular traditions that Shakespeare drew upon, as discussed by, for example, Weimann in *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in Theater* (1978). Secondly it uses the term ‘popular’ to challenge the dominant concept of Shakespeare as the exemplar of educated taste. Thirdly, it considers the ways in which Shakespeare has entered contemporary popular forms including film, TV and theatre, as considered by Douglas Lanier in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (2002), for example. The term is elastic and negotiating the different demands of the term can be difficult. Often, as in the example above, the most exciting student performances are those which use the elements of clown, *commedia dell’arte* and carnival to sidestep the definition altogether, accept the assessment criteria, and devise a performance using the text as a catalyst rather than as a straitjacket. Students use the play and naiveté of the clown to explore, reorder and represent the text, but simultaneously the playfulness of the clown can ignore the complexities and strictures of the practical demands of the institution.

The clowns play *Hamlet*

The two previous examples of performance outcomes by the student companies are based upon a reading of *Hamlet* as a text which displays many examples of clown practices, and starts from the central question, ‘who is the clown in *Hamlet*?’ The core of the presentations to and discussions with students proposes that, although a tragedy, *Hamlet* can be read as a text in which various practices of clown predominate, and argues that a key clown practice is to burlesque and parody the serious and tragic, puncturing and subverting authority.



Hamlet in the graveyard in the graveyard, 2010

The lecture on clown practices in *Hamlet* sits alongside a parallel lecture on Bakhtin and the carnivalesque, and the theories are explored further in practical workshops, as I have outlined above. In addition students are required to demonstrate their understanding and support their performance making through writing an essay on the comedy in *Hamlet*, choosing from a number of titles, for example, ‘*Hamlet* is such a great tragedy because it is so comic. Discuss’. At the outset however it is made clear that my reading of *Hamlet* as clownesque is partial and subjective, although negotiating my own practical and theoretical research into the practices of the clown is supported by a range of research by scholars of Shakespeare and early modern Drama, (Weimann 1978; Bristol 1985, Wiles 1987; Dollimore and Sinfield 1994; Gorfain 1998; Weimann 2000; Lanier 2002; Purcell 2009). However I am not only focussing on the relationship between actor and audience in early modern theatre, but

vital to any reading of the play is the interpretation through the performance of that play itself. There is the further understanding that the relationship between the clown and the audience is explored in the moment of performance itself, with its accidents and improvisations. I also make it clear that I am taking a very general account of the cultural, social and political functions of the early modern period. Finally I do not consider and compare the various versions of the play in any detail but I am using a current text of *Hamlet* (2006). In short, the content of the lecture gives a contemporary reading of the play by myself, a practitioner academic, as a catalyst for student participants to devise a clownesque version of the play. It permits the student to understand the readings and challenges to the traditional discourses and disciplines that have claimed the play, but is delivered as a clownesque act in itself.

As can be seen from the examples I have given above an approach many student companies take to the clownesque in *Hamlet* is that of ‘the clowns play *Hamlet*,’ that is, burlesquing a serious, tragic text. As Purcell (2009: 95-135) has written, there is a long history of Shakespearian burlesque and parody, beginning shortly after Shakespeare to the present day. Richard Schoch in *Not Shakespeare* (2002) considers the range of burlesques of Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century in both Britain and the USA. He makes the point that: ‘While Shakespeare burlesques certainly parodied specific actors, productions and methods of mis-en-scene, they also parodied the pomposities of official Shakespearian culture’ (2002: 6). He emphasises that ‘Since burlesque assumes the competency of their spectators, any change in the audience’s exposure to Shakespeare will introduce a corresponding change, not only in the burlesque’s appeal, but in its very intelligibility’ (2002:12). Purcell echoes this in the chapter in his book, and discusses the complexities of parody whereby in order to subvert Shakespeare it can only be done within the context of knowledge of the text. He writes:

On the one hand, the irreverent appropriation of elite cultural elements by popular forms can be seen as an empowering, even subversive, act of transgression; on the other, parody can be culturally elitist in itself, appealing to those only with enough knowledge of the parodied text to understand its references. (2009: 96)

Neither Schoch nor Purcell focuses specifically on the practices of the clown as parodist, and whilst Schoch usually refers to ‘burlesque’, Purcell refers to ‘parody’. In the quote from Schoch above he uses ‘burlesque’ and ‘parodied’ in the same sentence. It is not apparent from either of their writing what the distinction between them is, although reading between the lines it would seem that the ‘burlesque’ is appropriate to the nineteenth century which is Schoch’s focus, whereas the examples Purcell gives are mostly from the twenty-first century, including Kneehigh’s adaptation of *Cymbeline* in 2003 and *Bill Shakespeare’s Italian Job* (2003). Schoch does briefly define burlesque as, ‘... - the comic attack upon the pious pretensions of ‘legitimate’ Shakespearean culture - ...’ (2002: 3).

However, in my view the practices of parody and burlesque can be seen to be different in intention. As I noted in Chapter Four, in his teaching of clown and bouffon, Philippe Gaulier maintains that the physically deformed outcast that he identifies as the figure of the bouffon employs parody as a weapon; the intention is to savagely and forcefully attack hypocrisy and corruption of all types through verbal wit and laughter. Gaulier specifically names Dario Fo in *Mistero Buffo* (1988) as an example of ‘bouffon’. He maintained however that the clown uses burlesque, which is less an apparent attack and whose purpose is to playfully highlight the absurdity and ridiculousness of the serious and foolish. In his view the bouffon attacks specific targets, whereas the clown points up the absurdity of life itself. If the clown does burlesque specific institutions and practices the intention is not to wound but to reveal and play with the subject through laughter. I remember that during the ‘stage’ on bouffon, one student did a particularly good solo comic improvisation of a ridiculous game show, playing guests and smarmy host, with nonsensical rules and pointless prizes. Although we all laughed at this, Gaulier was adamant that this was the burlesque of the clown and not the vicious parody of the bouffon (Gaulier 1992). The implication is that although both bouffon and clown address their audience directly, the clown is more complicit with her audience, less alienating, whereas the bouffon might turn on their audience. In his ‘stage’ on ‘Shakespeare’, Philippe Gaulier gives Richard III as an example of a Shakespearean bouffon. The distinction between burlesque and parody, and between bouffon and clown is not as clear cut as he maintains, but it is useful. Having seen *Bill Shakespeare’s Italian Job* at the Edinburgh Festival in 2003 I would say that it is a light-hearted and ridiculous satire, and not a vicious

attack. Ultimately the definitions of all four terms, bouffon, clown, parody and burlesque are slippery, and as I have emphasised throughout this study, defining the characteristics of the clown is impossible, nevertheless the distinctions are useful to keep in mind as a background to understanding the degrees of subversion. The example of the student ‘To be, or not to be..’ *Hamlet* discussed above is not a savage parody; it is playful and comic, nevertheless it did bring out the tragedy of the play, and there was a truthfully comic depiction of rivalry and jealousy, and it could be argued that a clown *Hamlet* is both a burlesque and a parody.

The synthesis of burlesque with elements of a tragedy is difficult to achieve, even for experienced professional companies. One company who did achieve this, was Footsbarn Theatre Company who performed their version of *King Lear* (2003) at the Salisbury International Festival. This was a short entr’acte during an evening of excerpts, *Perchance to Dream*, from their adaptations of a number of Shakespeare’s plays from 1971 - 2004. They performed *Lear* as a clown birthday party, complete with cake. It is Lear’s birthday, and the cake will be distributed according to which of his three clown daughters gives him the nicest card and says the most complimentary things to him on his birthday. This permitted much figurative and literal messy play and slapstick, which ended with Cordelia covered in cream and pieces of cake. Although the Footsbarn version drew on the traditional circus ‘slosh’ entrée, and was very comic, the performance demonstrated tragic resonance, and the plight of Cordelia, and Lear’s downfall was conveyed through the skilled performances of the clowns, whose contact with the audience, in McManus’s terms, ‘blurring of the borders of mimetic space’ (2003: 12) created a bond between audience and performer in which the audience assented to the clowns subverting the tragedy through clowning and then allowed them to subvert audience expectations of the clown text by reintroducing tragedy. At the other end of the scale clowns in the circus frequently burlesque the ‘serious’ acts. For example in Zippo’s Circus in 1996¹⁸, Clown Stiffy performed a comic wire walking entrée, in which, after several attempts, he succeeded in walking the low wire, much to the audience’s relief and delight.

¹⁸ It may have been 1997. Even Stiffy (Steve Taylor) could not remember, although we had a lengthy discussion about it one night, and tried to find the programme for those years but to no avail. He remembered (Taylor 2011) that he performed it for two seasons, the first season with Charlotte Barltrop, who was his non-whiteface whiteface.

Stiffy's act had several functions, which can also be useful in analysing the approach of clowns to playing *Hamlet*:

- As release

The comedy releases the tension engendered by the serious acts in the circus. In the circus reality and fake are intertwined and indivisible in every circus act. For example, an aerial act requires strength and skill, it is dangerous and exhausting, yet the reality is made to look easy, that is, it is acted. The anthropologist Yoram Carmeli considers the concepts of the 'real' and the 'impossible' in impressive and fascinating detail in an essay (1990) in which he analyses the range of performance practices by the acts in a British touring family circus. His focus is on a small circus in the 1970s before the wider development of so-called 'New Circus', which may sometimes play with the very concepts of 'real' and 'fake'. For example, Momentary Fusion Aerial Dance-Theatre, Sophy Griffiths and Isabel Rocamora, performed a piece in their show *High Vaultage* (1995) in which radio microphones were attached to them, so that the accompanying sounds were of guttural cries, their breathing, and their heart beat. In an email exchange Isabel stated that they used mikes '...for two reasons: to bring the audience closer to the interior worlds of these two suspended women and to expose the emotional qualities inherent in the gestural choreography...seeking an emotive experience over the spectacle of tricks (Rocamora 2011a). She also noted that they were influenced by '...Julia Kristeva and her theories of the pre-symbolic language in *A Revolution of Poetic Language*...' (2011a). My reading however was that the piece beautifully revealed the tensions between the aesthetically pleasing and carefully choreographed moves of the performance, with the real sounds of the actual physical work of the act of performing – a phenomenology of the trapeze. This was confirmed by Isabel who emailed that in a rehearsal note for 12 March 1995 she had written, 'This scene should be raw, strong, primitive (not choreographically aesthetic). The sounds which the voice makes due to body strain and movement, such as high grips sliding down onto one arm' (Rocamora 2011b). Although Momentary Fusion's piece deliberately re-orders the real/fake binary nevertheless I would argue that any serious circus act is both a demonstration of strength, discipline, long hours of training, application, precise timing, with choreographed moves, whose play with this distinction is recognised and admired by the spectator.

- As subversion

Stiffy's act subverted the serious act, pointing up its absurdity, and clownesquely reminding the spectator of the foolishness of being impressed.

- As ambiguity

It reveals the ambiguity in the clown's entrée, in which the purposeful but hopeful and incompetent clown is shown to be a highly skilled performer in the sense of having acquired a skill (wire walking) through practice and application, as well as an impressive use of play. Stiffy is both highly skilled and incompetent, and plays on the audience appreciating this fact.

- As audience conduit

The audience identifies with both the clown in himself, and with the act of perseverance and eventual success of the clown against the odds. The clown appears to be just like us, but is revealed as possessing a special skill, not at all like us.

- As reversal of status

The clown entrée plays with and subverts the complex hierarchy of the circus, in which the clowns are, in the overarching narrative of the circus, at the bottom of the hierarchy, whereas, for the audience, the clowns are able to move up and down the hierarchy, and although there may be respect for the wire walkers, there is empathy with the clowns.

- As commentator on the fiction

The clown's play within this larger narrative, especially in the important role of comic counterpoint to acts of danger, implicitly and occasionally explicitly, comments on the fictive nature of the entire circus event, of performance, and of life itself.

This last function is especially important in the consideration of *Hamlet*, with its concerns with play and playing, of 'presentation and representation' to use Weimann's terms (2000: 11-17), which relate to issues of function, where 'representation' is concerned with the actor acting the text more or less realistically, and 'presentation' is the stepping out from the

fictional frame to present the text, and comment upon it. There is also the sense that ‘presentation’ is directed to and played with the audience both verbally and with the body. The folding in of ‘representation’ and ‘presentation’ is key to the performance mode of the clown, and Stiffy’s apparently simple entrée reveals an engagement with a number of constantly shifting perspectives between performer and audience, which are useful in considering a comedic re-presentation of *Hamlet*. All the above functions were interwoven into the student companies’ burlesque performances, and were apparent also in the site-specific performance installation in the woods.

The other night I went to the cinema to see *Man on Wire*. It’s a documentary, part fictionalised, about Philippe Petit, who in 1974 walked on a wire between the Twin Towers of New York’s World Trade Center. Marvellous! But a few things struck me. One was the amount of rehearsal and planning needed to do it. The team and the timing were absolutely crucial. The second thing was that when he did it he said he got lost in the act, at one point lying down on the wire and watching the clouds. He didn’t know that he’d been up on the wire for forty-five minutes. He was arrested when he came in from the wire and charged with trespass. Trespass of the sky! Brilliant! The judge ordered him to perform his clown act, juggling and magic for the children in an orphanage. That’s another way of disciplining the clown of course.

Hamlet as clown

Just as Stiffy’s burlesque of the wire-walking act required Stiffy to be an expert wire-walker himself, so the burlesque of *Hamlet* requires expert knowledge of the text to explode it. The approach to the text in which ‘the clowns play *Hamlet*’ is enmeshed with and draws on a reading of the play which considers *Hamlet* as a clownesque text itself; it is a play about clowns which is also a play for clowns. From this perspective Hamlet plays the clown, wears

a mask of foolishness, in order to reveal what he considers to be the truth about his father's murder. This identification of Hamlet with the fool has been discussed by many other scholars (Nicholl 1963; Willeford 1969; Wiles 1987) and yet Hamlet is not only the fool, he is also the protagonist, the tragic hero, and veers between representation and presentation. The complexities of this constant renegotiation are explored throughout the action, and there is the sense that in playing the fool his attempt to uncover the truth is, in fact, foolish. Hamlet tests his theory through clowning, and in the process has a narrative arc which moves from a reflective position to an active one. His encounters with other clownesque and foolish characters in the play, 'fools natural and artificial,' to borrow Towsen's (1976: 3) title of his first chapter, may or may not reveal the truth about the murder, but reveal Hamlet to us, the audience. There is constant clownesque slippage between Hamlet, the fictional character, and the actor playing Hamlet. William Willeford in his chapter on the character of Hamlet and his relationship to the fool writes that:

The role of the clown seems to Hamlet to provide him with the sought-for position of a *punctum indifferens* in the midst of the action, but the role is a trap from which he must fight to get out though he fights in vain. (Willeford 1969: 196)

This suggests that Hamlet adopts the disguise of the clown, which allows him to occupy a dual position in the fictional space of the play, that of hero and clown. Whilst it is arguable whether he stands at the centre of the action or whether, until the final scene, he is figuratively on the edge of the action, there is a sense that Hamlet is not only being, whilst also acting, but is playing and doing.

Whilst there are specific examples of the text which may be interpreted performatively as clown which I shall discuss shortly, there is also much evidence that Hamlet plays his own clown. It has been argued by Michael Bristol in *Carnival and Theater* (1985) that in early modern England popular festive forms, such as carnival, are enmeshed with the newly emerging theatrical forms. This is not to say that the subversion and critical demystifying of the dominant ideology are located in various centres such as theatre, but that there is much more mixing of forms. This is comparable to today where individuals, such as myself, are

both subject to and supportive of institutional practices but are also critical of them. Like Hamlet himself we are caught up in world not solely of our making, although we do contribute to the making of that world, which we subsequently endeavour to understand. The entire play may thus be read as a dark carnival in which the world has been turned upside down, and Hamlet himself has to adopt various masks of the clown in order to right it. This eventually ends in the sword fight between Laertes and Hamlet (5.2) about which Bristol writes, 'In a sense even Hamlet's death is a laughing matter, the result of miscalculation and farcical bungling...' (1985: 193). David Wiles takes a slightly different position in *Shakespeare's Clown* (1987), where he argues that Shakespeare is obliquely commenting on the fool, Will Kemp, whose services the company had lost by the time of *Hamlet*, and whose improvisations may have been the subject of disciplining by the company. He writes that '...when Shakespeare fails to bring on a clown amongst the 'tragedians of the city' in *Hamlet*, he deliberately reminds the Globe audience that the real tragedians who play before them have lost the services of Kemp. The relevance of this reminder emerges when Hamlet casts himself as the fool of both 'The Mousetrap' and *Hamlet*' (1987: 57).

I shall now select several textual moments in the play, which I interpret as showing how Hamlet might be performed as clown, as well as other examples of clowning in the play. The first is Hamlet's speeches to the Players (3.2.1-43), in which an amateur tells the professional players how to both perform the speech that Hamlet has previously enacted for the Players when he meets them (2.2.359-435) and later not to perform (3.2.36-43). This is an extremely layered and complex speech. Not only does it serve as a discourse on acting itself, but Hamlet, who is himself playing the fool, is disciplining the fool. The stage direction to the scene states '*Enter Hamlet and three of the Players*' and begins with Hamlet saying, 'Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you – trippingly on the tongue' (3.2.1-2). He then continues by demonstrating the gestures that he disapproves of, 'Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus...' (3.2.4-5). Writing about this speech in the 'bad' quarto Weimann observes, 'Thereby, he can, in one and the same speech collapse two different orders of authority in the purpose of playing. One follows humanistically sanctioned mimetic precepts associated with Donatus and Cicero, the other – in the teeth of their rejection- the contemporary practices of Tarlton and company' (2000: 23). The later speech by Hamlet,

beginning 'O, reform it altogether, and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them (3.2.36-37), is spoken by the fictional character Hamlet, and may not be the view of Shakespeare himself. From a current practitioner's viewpoint it is of course difficult not to take this at face value and place a modern view of realistic acting on the text. As Colin Chambers notes in *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company: Creativity and the Institution* 'Informing much of the RSC's Shakespeare has been an a-historicism that stressed similarities between the present and the past...' (2004: 120). As he states this leads to a rather broad style of performance, in which '...clowns speak with a 'provincial' accent' (2004: 120), which is at odds with the complexities of both the text and the actual historical context of the plays. Shakespeare was a member of a company and writing for particular individuals with particular styles of performing, and the actor Richard Burbage, as Wiles notes, 'would play both', '...clown and tragic hero...' (1987: 57). Weimann discusses the speech in *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice* (2000) as an example of a 'bifold authority' (2000: 24). The actor playing Hamlet, the tragic hero, is playing with both the serious voice of the text and the clown is simultaneously undercutting and subverting the heroic voice. In this speech, therefore, Hamlet is using both 'representational' and 'presentational' modes.

Wiles's fascinating comment on Burbage does raise a question about a phenomenological difference between clown and actor. I have stated that Hamlet 'adopts' the mask of the clown, that is, he acts the clown, but he is not the clown. Burbage was not Kemp, he was an actor playing the clown, and probably very good at it for all any of us know, even Weimann. In the recent tenancy of Hamlet by David Tennant who played the role for the RSC (2008-9) it was generally noted that Tennant brought out the humour in the play. In his review Michael Billington noted that 'This is a Hamlet of quicksilver intelligence, mimetic vigour and wild humour: one of the funniest I've ever seen. He parodies everyone he talks to, from the prattling Polonius to the verbally ornate Osric. After the play scene, he careers around the court sporting a crown at a tipsy angle' (2008). Clearly it is possible for the actor to play clown, and the text, Shakespeare's, can be interpreted for the actor-as-clown. The difference is whether the clown (Kemp/Palfi/Lee Evans/Dario Fo) could, or would want, to play Hamlet. Whatever the clown does reaches out to the audience in a way that even Hamlet's

presentational mode in the soliloquies does not. My mantra and starting point for this study is Frost and Yarrow's statement in *Improvisation and the Drama*:

The clown plays. The clown plays the realities of what and where and with whom he finds himself to be. He cannot know those realities in advance, for so much of it depends upon us, the audience, that it cannot be pre-planned. Everything is *new* to the clown. (1990: 68-9; Frost and Yarrow's italics)

In practice, the clown stands before the audience and plays in the moment, alert to the tiniest response; planned material is willingly jettisoned if the opportunity for play presents itself. Thus although one can theorise about *Hamlet* as a vehicle for clown play, the performance by the clowns starts from the play with the audience in the shared space. This is the real carnivalesque subversion by the clown: with a nod and a wink the clown can wrap up the whole cumbersome edifice of revenge, politics, social behaviour, and reveal its absurdity. Hamlet can only tell the players that the clown must stick to the script and not wave his arms about too much. He failed to add that he shouldn't even look at his audience, although even that would not be enough. As I stated in Chapter Two, the clown is thrown out of the ring and stands at the edge saying, 'Watch me; don't watch me'.

The gravedigger scene (5.1) is a key scene which is open to a clownesque reading and consideration of the different practices of the clown within the play. In her discussion of the scene Phyllis Gorfain writes 'The clowns question what constitutes truth and what counts for a lie; they decompose the differences of gender and class with the radical relativity of death' (1998: 166). In their notes on *Hamlet* referring to the gravediggers, the editors, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor write, 'In all three texts the primary meaning of *clown* is 'rustic' rather than 'comedian', but here as elsewhere in Shakespeare, rustic characters are used to provide comic relief' (Shakespeare 2006: 409). This corresponds to the definition of clown that Gaulier stated in his 'stage' (1992c), as the clown is the naïve who comes from the country to the town and does not understand how it works. Yet in *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* James Shapiro suggests that the more recent replacement clown, the

sophisticated Robert Armin, would have played the ‘witty, riddling Gravedigger’ (2005: 248). The gravedigger clown is here both rustic and sophisticated, and not to be defined so easily. And it is in this scene that several clown tropes coincide and clash. Hamlet is the tragic hero who plays the clown, whereas the clowns are clowns who play the gravediggers. Hamlet, the ‘disguised’ fool, encounters the professional fool(s), who are themselves playing the roles of the gravedigger who have come to bury Ophelia. The gravediggers’ mode of clowning is that which might be termed ‘artificial’ fools. They are professional fools, with a clear difference in status, who play the role of fool and adopt the persona, in contrast to the ‘natural’ fools. The natural fool was frequently the idiot or the madman who had found a role as a professional fool or jester (Towsen 1976). Although their given role is that of gravediggers, they are clowns first and foremost, riddling about death, sparring verbally and punning, although the second gravedigger leaves at (5.1.56), and the first is left alone, singing, until (5.1.61) Hamlet and Horatio enter. We now have a clown trio, although Horatio only makes five short interjections, all with Hamlet, in their interchange. Horatio’s role is very much a bystander in this scene although he is vital to it, as he is an audience to the verbal and physical sparring between Hamlet and the gravediggers. But Horatio also has another function as a fictional representative of and witness for the actual audience in the theatre, which is very much the traditional whiteface role. What then happens is that the skull, an Elizabethan symbol of mortality and a frequent memento mori, is here thrown up from the empty grave and clowned with, made subject of carnivalesque fooling, in a dark clowning with death. Although the gravedigger does not know that the interloper is Hamlet, there is a reversal of status after the throwing up of the first skull (5.1.71), as the main focus is on the gravedigger not on Hamlet. The gravedigger refuses to respond to Hamlet’s verbal clowning with the skull, and ignores him while he continues to dig. He even sings the next verse of the song, (5.1.89-91), after which he throws up a second skull, which Hamlet, in a long speech claims is that of a lawyer. Eventually Hamlet asks him:

Hamlet: ‘Whose grave’s this, sirra ?

Gravedigger: Mine, sir,
(Sings)

O, a pit of clay for to be made –

Hamlet: I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in’t (5.1.110-113)

Hamlet has been verbally improvising with the skulls up till this moment, in Weimann's 'bifold manner', as clown and tragic hero, but now the status is again reversed, and he becomes the continual butt of the gravedigger's clowning. Here Hamlet's role is both that of whiteface clown and the drole to the gravedigger's auguste clown. In other words Hamlet's status synthesises both the highest and the lowest in the clown hierarchy, and recalls his speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in 2.2, beginning 'What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties...(303-304), and ending '...and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?' (308). Throughout this exchange Hamlet is gradually reduced to being the feed for the gravedigger, and his questions become shorter and crisper, until eventually he asks a simple question about the third skull, 'Whose was it?' (5.1.165). According to the gravedigger it is Yorick's, the professional court fool of Hamlet's father. At which point Hamlet has only a one word question, 'This?' (5.1.173). A reading of the text does suggest that Yorick was the 'natural' clown, and possibly for an early modern audience another reminder of the absent Kemp. The gravedigger refers to him as '...a mad rogue. 'A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once! (5.1.169-170). At this point Hamlet ceases to be the butt of the gravedigger, again changes status to become the philosopher clown, confronting this symbol of clown as the ultimate butt of life, that is, death, 'Where be your jibes – your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?' (5.1.179-181). Even in this dark address Hamlet cannot resist an absolute grim witticism, 'Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen?' (5.1.189). This is visually ludicrous, physically impossible, and darkly comic, and Hamlet's mode of playing is now that of the bouffon, rather than the clown. It also reminds us of his advice to the players, 'whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature...' (3.2.20-23). At this moment Hamlet's mirror is Yorick, the clown in death, and whilst neither Hamlet nor Yorick can see themselves, Hamlet can clearly see what he will become. Hamlet then once again becomes the Auguste, using Horatio as his whiteface, and there is an echo of the gravedigger in that he sings (5.1.202-205). Immediately after this he apparently abandons his clowning and reasserts the tragic hero when he discovers that it is Ophelia who is being buried, although even here he presents rather than represents the tragic hero. He turns the funeral upside down by grappling with Laertes, who jumps in Ophelia's

grave, and his speech is in the register of the ‘natural’ clown, the bouffon, using extraordinary language, ‘Woul’t drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?/I’ll do’t (5.1.265-266). Hamlet is no longer putting on the mask of the clown to seek out the truth about a murder; he becomes the ultimate clown himself, allying himself with Yorick.

Whilst Hamlet initially deliberately adopts the mask of the clown to unmask the riddle of Elsinore, he eventually does become the clown in reality. His clowning shares two attributes with the clown that I have discussed in this study. The first is a refusal to be pinned down and to be categorised; he displays a quixotic temperament, and any attempt by the other characters to define his behaviour is immediately subverted by a Hamlet putting on a new clown mask. In the gravediggers’ scene (5.1) the shifts of clown persona and corresponding play with status become quite bewildering and the audience is unable to keep up with him. A twentieth-century counterpart can be found in the character of the Maniac in Dario Fo’s *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (2003b). Both Hamlet and the Maniac avoid being disciplined by the institution, the court of Elsinore and the police respectively, through a chameleon-like metamorphosis each time they are on the brink of being apprehended. However, Hamlet also displays another key clown attribute, that of continual deferral and delay of the trick. For Stiffy in Zippo’s Circus, a great pleasure for the audience lies in him continually being sidetracked from his wire-walking, and there is delight when he skillfully achieves it. However Hamlet’s constant deferral of avenging his father’s murder leads in the end to the tragedy of the multiple deaths of nearly the whole court. I would suggest that this is where the dialectic of tragic hero, who must avenge the murder, with the clown, who continually defers it, runs counter to each other. The synthesis is in the ultimate carnival of death in 5.2, in which, with the arrival of Fortinbras, a new order arises, the carnival ends and ‘real’ life is restored.

The clownesque in *Hamlet*

In the preceding passage I have focussed on the ways in which Hamlet himself is a clown and whilst the two scenes I have discussed above lend themselves to a clownesque reading, it is possible to make a case for many other examples of the text to be used as vehicles for clown

play. In an article in *Shakespeare Survey*, Ann Thompson (2003) also considers a number of examples of the comedy in *Hamlet*. However, I should emphasise that in the following selection I am being creative in choosing passages from the play which display clownesque elements. These examples are by no means exhaustive and are, to some extent, those that appeal to me; they are subjective, although they are examples of different attributes and tropes of clowning. They are specifically chosen for their interpretation in performance, and I would suggest that there are numerous other passages which anyone who is devising a contemporary production which explores the clown in *Hamlet* might select according to the focus of their project.

Firstly, there is a use of rhythm, which is played as a standard ‘call and response’:

Hamlet: Hold you the watch tonight?

All: We do my Lord

Hamlet: Arm’d you say?

All: Arm’d my Lord

Ham: From top to toe?

All: My lord, from head to foot.

(1.2.225-7)

This sequence follows a specific rhythmical response, and is reinforced by the repetition of the ‘from...to’ conjunction in lines 226/227. As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor observe in a note in the Arden edition, ‘Indeed Q1/F’s repetition is seen as an actor’s interpolation by Jenkins, but again it regularizes the metre...’ (2006: 185). This comic trope is not specific to clown entrées but is standard fare for panto, ‘Oh yes it is, oh no it isn’t’, which includes other actors on the stage and audience; street theatre (Mason 1992); and *commedia dell’arte* lazzi. Tag Teatro’s Carlo Boso used repetition and exaggeration on numerous occasions in his two week long *commedia* masterclass, at the London International Workshop Festival (1989) in which I participated. In the evenings he directed participants in the first scene of Goldoni’s *A Servant of Two Masters* (1989) as he frequently did in his workshops (Rudlin and Crick 2001: 71). The actual version of the play he used is unclear as he pronounced the English version he was offered ‘rubbish’ and made participants create their own under his precise direction, based on

his intimate knowledge of the Italian version of the Piccolo Teatro production, directed by Giorgio Strehler, with whom he trained.

In 2009 a student company on the module did an excellent burlesque of *Hamlet*, which they performed outside in a natural amphitheatre on campus, with a slight slope behind them. This allowed for some imaginative scenography with entrances and exits, especially murdered characters swirling into limbo, where they all met up with each other. The high point however was the entrance of the Ghost, who entered by skateboarding down the slope, and then, at the bottom, swapping the skateboard for a concealed pogo stick, on which he bounced into the playing area, whilst attempting to act realistically and speak the speech beginning, ‘I am thy father’s spirit/ Doomed for a certain term to walk the night etc ...’ (1.5.9-23). Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus reacted with absolute terror at this apparition, whilst the audience was convulsed with laughter. (I’m actually laughing at the memory as I write this). Not only was this a fine example of the clownesque in its incongruity between aim and execution, but it did also raise the question of dramaturgically how a contemporary production might present the Ghost effectively. My perhaps unreliable memory of several serious productions of *Hamlet* is that of a Ghost clumping onto the stage enveloped in a swirl of dry ice, which gradually drifts into the front three rows of the stalls, causing much coughing, and underwhelming its audience by its lack of ghostliness. Even the acclaimed 1980 production at The Royal Court, directed by Richard Eyre, in which Jonathan Pryce played both Hamlet and then was himself inhabited by the Ghost, convulsing his body, while the words burst forth from him in a strangulated fashion, caused some laughter in the audience when I saw it, although this being high culture, was immediately stifled. And yet the passage when Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus encounter the ghost, (1.5.149-180) and are asked to swear an oath can be interpreted and played comically. The voice comes from under the stage, and despite the Elizabethan association with Hell (see note, Thompson & Taylor 2006: 223), for clowns it is reminiscent of the *Ghost Routine*, an often-used entrée of both circus clowns and pantomime performance.

Ophelia has two speeches (2.1.74 -81; 2.1 87-100) which describe Hamlet comically. Hamlet has put on the mask of the clown, but it is Ophelia, a boy playing a woman, playing Hamlet, playing a clown, who represents and presents his actions to Polonius. Phyllis Gorfain

however maintains that Ophelia's '...songs and enactments of feminine disintegration...' (1998: 62), are different from Hamlet in that '...her versions of these ludic forms only call attention to the differences between her powerless performances and Hamlet's reflexive ones' (1998:62). Thus Hamlet is still the focus of her report, although it is worth quoting the second speech in full as it demonstrates a building physical and gestural momentum, which in performance, the actor playing Ophelia could usurp Hamlet's clowning and demonstrate that she is the equal in physical comedy. This momentum is especially demonstrated in 2.1.97-98, where Ophelia/Hamlet exits without looking where she is going, a time-honoured sequence by almost any clown you care to name. Jacques Tati in *Cours du Soir* (1967) actually demonstrates such an action, with the result, of course, that he mistimes his step and bumps into the wall:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
 And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
 He falls to such perusal of my face
 As 'a would draw it. Long stayed he so.
 At last a little shaking of mine arm
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
 As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
 And end his being. That done, he lets me go;
 And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
 He seemed to find his way without his eyes;
 For out o' doors he went without their helps
 And to the last bended their light on me
 (2.1.87-100)

Hamlet has some moments where he clowns with his body, especially in both 3.2 and 5.1, but the general impression is that he is not a particularly physical clown; his clowning for the most part is based round verbal wit, puns, and riddles. His imagery in his wit tends towards the grotesque and is often a reminder of death and despair. Numerous examples abound throughout the play, but here are two examples from 2.2:

Polonius: ...Will you walk out of the air, my lord?
Hamlet: Into my grave?
 (2.2.206-70)

And:

Polonius: ...My honourable lord, I will
most humbly take my leave of you.

Hamlet: You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I
will not more willingly part withal – except my life,
except my life, except my life.

(2.2.213-217)

The repetition of ‘except my life’, with its falling cadences is particularly clownesque in that clowns and comedians often employ the technique of repetition, the ‘rule of three.’ But as stated at the beginning of this section, so much resides in the presentation: a Tommy Cooper Hamlet; an Eric Morecambe Hamlet; a Lee Evans Hamlet; a Victoria Wood Hamlet.

I conclude this section with a word of warning against my own reading of the text. As discussed in Chapter Two a clown is a self-created, individual persona - in other words no one else can play an individual’s clown and this is one reason why, short of banishment and imprisonment, it is consequently very difficult for the institution to discipline the clown. Both Kemp and Armin would have had very different styles of playing, and scholars have discussed the textual differences which Shakespeare wrote for their different personae. Shakespeare would have collaborated with them in writing the scenes suited to their own individual style, and collaboration in the sense of working with a group or individual and agreeing is also difficult to censor. But if it is the case that the clowns have been party to the agreement, it can be argued that there is no subversion as the censorship has occurred beforehand. Moreover it is important to note that there is a continuum of the clownesque in the play and whilst a case could be made that all characters in *Hamlet* are fools in some sense, this may mean no more than that they behave foolishly. Polonius may be foolish, and Hamlet refers to him as one of ‘These tedious old fools!’ (2.2.219), but he is not actually playing the fool. He owes something to the characters of the *commedia dell’arte*, as Rob Conkie observed to me in passing (2005), noting that ‘Polonius is a cross between Pantalone and the Dottore’. Likewise whilst the character of the fop Osric has clownesque qualities, and it is my contention that Robert Armin could have played him, he is a comic character within the play, and serves as the butt of Hamlet’s clowning rather than a clown. Nicoll in *The World of Harlequin* compares the character of Harlequin, the clown in *commedia*, with that of Hamlet, noting,

amongst other things, that ‘...we do not look for Hamlet elsewhere than in Shakespeare’s tragedy’ (1963: 7). It might be argued that he also has a supporting role in Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), for example, but this is still a version of *Hamlet*. He does not step outside the play, whereas Harlequin is generic to the *commedia* form. Similarly a clown is a clown...and may exist through many different performances and in different situations, as do Shakespeare’s clowns, Will Kemp and Robert Armin.

Observations

There is one area where students, despite finding the text difficult, feel an affinity with the character of Hamlet, in that both he and they are attempting to grapple with the indices of an institution, the University of Winchester in their case, whose rules and ethos are apparently explicit, but are constantly changing, which they are clearly aware of, yet which they find generally difficult to express. Some manage this negotiation successfully (according to the rules and practices of the institution); others manage it successfully (according to their own rules). Using the text of *Hamlet* as a starting point for devising a clown performance brings up many issues around the relationship with the institution. In terms of the demands of the particular module *Popular Traditions* on which students were studying (learning outcomes, assessment criteria,) are students simply dealing with a representation of the text in another guise, or are they genuinely exploring a creative and collaborative process, which may lead them into unknown and consequently frightening territory, one which might admit failure? An important part of this chapter has been concerned with this process, and the different ways in which the Ur material is used, and how and why decisions are made to keep or discard material.

One nagging question that has arisen over the course of the project has been whether a clownesque *Hamlet* is little more than another ‘take’ on the play, another clever production amongst the myriad takes on the play? Is there a subversion of and a challenge to the dominant, or does the module nestle comfortably in the institution? Lanier in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (2002) gives a large but by no means exhaustive number of

examples of the ways in which Shakespeare (*Hamlet* included) has been adapted, exploded, parodied and alluded to in live and recorded performance and literature, including film, cartoons, novels, and sitcoms. In 2004 when I started teaching the module, there were a number of productions in the UK which attempted to popularise *Hamlet* in different ways. To give just three examples, these ranged from a solo adaptation, *Hamlet: Stand Up* at the Edinburgh Festival, to a *commedia dell'arte* version in a tent as part of the National Theatre's season of free outdoor events, 'Watch This Space', to Cornish based Miracle Theatre's tour of open air and unusual venues, in a *Hamlet* which promised:

Whether it is your favourite play or you were the one staring out the window in English, Miracle's exuberant production is guaranteed to change the way you feel about *Hamlet*! (Miracle Theatre 2004)

To emphasise this, the poster portrayed a semi-naked, drowned Ophelia, surrounded by obviously fake blood, flowers and a yellow rubber duck. Fast forwarding to 2009, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 2009 there was a production of *Hamlet* in which the audience plays bingo, as well as a production which promised, '...a new version visually inspired by the worlds of Jules Verne and HG Wells' (Edinburgh Fringe Programme 2009: 198), and another adaptation about which Charlotte Higgins reported in *The Guardian* on 10th August 2009, writing, '...and in *Ophelia (Drowning)* you can watch Shakespeare's character expire in the style of John Everett Millais's famous painting' (Higgins 2009: 11).

But perhaps my assumptions reveal my own insecurities and ambiguities over making a tragedy accessible, my secret passion for realistically acted tragedy, and the awe that an iconic work can induce in me. Some students do not have any special reverence for the text, and this lack of awe actually is of benefit to them in their exploding it, as they do not carry any baggage, not having been trained in the required respect for Shakespeare. Like No 2 Theatre Co I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, they may not know the play or Shakespeare, except perhaps through the school trip, and the occasional film such as Baz Luhrmann's (not Shakespeare's) *Romeo + Juliet* (1996). For them William Shakespeare is a shadowy, bearded figure who wrote in old-fashioned English and many students are sensitive to the patronising

practice of the attempt to make Shakespeare ‘relevant,’ so perhaps I am being sniffy in my concern that the popularisation assumes a lack of critical understanding on their part. I would doubt whether Miracle Theatre and their audience feel that they are being dangerously subversive with this production, or even that they should have to be. There is a justifiable pragmatics here, of making a production that is enjoyable and accessible, which brings in audiences, and also attempts to imbue the play with a new resonance. Miracle Theatre are doing no more than the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre who often bring in a star actor to appeal to an audience, or have two actors and two linked plays with the actors swapping roles. And yet the *Popular Traditions* module does challenge the perception of *Hamlet* as an unassailable and canonical text through two parallel currents that are in counterpoint to each other: an understanding of *Hamlet* through the clown, and an understanding of the clown through *Hamlet*. What has always resulted from the work of the students has been, whatever the quality of each performance judged against specific academic criteria, a unique piece of creative practice, since each student company has worked out a specific devising method which has given rise to fresh perspectives on *Hamlet*, even if the company are not able to precisely articulate and discuss their method and findings.

What have constrained the project have been unavoidable institutional practices themselves. Attempts to move away from the set pattern of weekly delivery at this level were dictated by space and timetabling, as well as availability of staff and resources. Students were in the room with the tutor for three hours per week and the tutor was perceived as an expert, who if he or she did not know all the answers, at least knew more about actual content than the student. The students had to undertake set assignments in order to pass the module and progress on to the next stage of their learning. The module was presented in a linear fashion, responding to the discipline of ‘Drama Studies,’ validated and agreed by the University and responding to notions of higher education in the UK, including discipline benchmarks. Although there was a brief acknowledgement that students’ studies in other modules might be useful, and that it built on previous knowledge, the module was discrete, and could be studied out of context by the students. However it might be argued that it empowered the students to make the connections with other areas of study for themselves. Nevertheless it implicitly

reinforced students' awareness of the ways in which University teaching operates and, by extension, it fixed and stratified tacit codes of intellectual learning and study.

There are several implicit, unprofessed and unacknowledged aims of the module. The two assessment points which test students' learning - the 1500 word traditional academic essay and the devised performance - respond to standard institutional practices of the University and are fairly standard assignments on undergraduate programmes in the Department of Performing Arts. As Theresa Lillis writes, 'The essay is a particular way of constructing knowledge, which has come to be privileged within the institution.' (Lillis 2001: 20) The module handbook states the expected learning outcomes, and transferable skills; the weekly breakdown both reassures, and in some cases, worries the students. Tutors, external examiners, quality assessors from within and external to the University are reassured that despite its professed aims of challenge, the module is still a serious and therefore an academic one, institutionalising study of the popular, and through this study containing and legitimising it. However, the actual practice of teaching and learning is somewhat different, in that, throughout the module, the notion of 'playfulness' 'complicity' and play' is considered paramount by tutors in every aspect, including the formalised lectures both on *Hamlet* and on Bakhtin and carnival. The practical sessions on *commedia dell'arte*, clown, and in 2006-7 on circus, are intended to be as lively and exciting as possible. The material delivery of the module has become a crucible for experimentation and is enmeshed with discussions with students of how complex these areas are. It attempts to demonstrate through practice that the binaries of low and high, popular and dominant are a construct which are riddled with contradictions and ambiguities. The placing of lectures with practical work is designed so that each complement and challenge the other, and the essay is intended (hopefully) to be seen as an enjoyable exercise in applying theory to practice.

Where my role of 'dramaturg clown' has, I believe, begun to develop a new focus for the clown, is that there is a deliberate and playful process of dialogue between myself and other tutors, the students, and others in the institution, including the University Health and Safety Officer. This has been greatly influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogicity, which is threaded through his essay *Discourse in the Novel* (1981). He writes about language as

utterance, and maintains that the utterance is dialogical, that it is multi-voiced, full of tensions and layered with both explicit and implicit meaning. Theresa Lillis puts this very succinctly in her book *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire*:

The nature of language as utterance is fundamentally dialogical; utterances are neither unitary in meaning nor can be fixed (as suggested by a dictionary or a traditional grammar) but, embedded as they are in sociocultural practice, are dynamic in their contribution to meaning making' (2001: 41).

Our utterances not only convey meaning but also construct meaning, and furthermore our meaning may be different to what we intended. By extension, our control over meaning making is wayward and complex; meaning is constructed between speakers, and in some sense we assume that we already know what the other person is saying, hence people frequently interrupt each other when they are talking. As Sue Vice discusses in her chapter on Bakhtin's dialogism in *Introducing Bakhtin* (1997: 45-111), Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is linked with two other concepts in which he discusses the layered nature of language, heteroglossia and polyphony, although, according to Vice, heteroglossia is a linguistic description of synchronic language, and polyphony is specific to the ways in which language is used in the novel. Lillis has coined the term 'addressivity' (2001: 43-44) as a further key Bakhtinian concept, in that basically all utterances are, 'addressed to someone' (2001:43). We adopt a mode of speaking and writing which we feel is appropriate for the exchange, and feel bewildered and annoyed, when the mode is inappropriate. A fascinating example occurred on *University Challenge* (2004) when the captain of the Portsmouth University team responded to a question from Jeremy Paxman, 'sorry, we don't know, mate,' to which Paxman acerbically replied, 'oh bad luck mate!' This utterance was interesting in that the Portsmouth student was not playing by the perceived rules of exchange in *University Challenge*, but was dialogically challenging the concept of University. Jeremy Paxman was acerbic because the monologicity of the rigorous questioning by the tough-minded questioner had been dialogised. A real and revealing communication had taken place, although this was not the intended exchange. For the clown however, the inappropriate is appropriate.

Thus, these two concepts of dialogism and addressivity challenge the conduit notion of utterances, namely that the words of the speaker are conveyed to the listener, who hears them, understands them correctly and responds appropriately. Even seemingly monologic utterances are, to some extent, dialogical, although when the sergeant major barks ‘Attenshun!’ to the assembled privates on the parade ground, this is monologic, but in the everyday practice of utterance, what we say between each other is a matter for negotiation, hence dialogic. The dialogic model I have outlined is, of course, fraught with misunderstanding, and frequently creates confusion, especially where different status of the speakers is assumed or apparent, as in student/tutor relationships, but this is its appeal for the clownesque in particular, and comedy in general, as can be seen, for example, in *The Armstrong and Miller Show* (2007-10), with their wonderful street slang-using RAF officers. As Vice writes, ‘Where high and low registers of language dialogize (*sic*) each other in the historical context of folk humour, we can detect the presence of the carnivalesque’ (1997: 50). In other words, the playfulness and subversion of the different clown practices in the context of a creative exploration of *Hamlet* are negotiated through playing on monologism, and reworking it as dialogism. This was demonstrated beautifully in 2005, when a group of very enterprising students synthesised *Hamlet* with the text of an English Mummers play, which they then performed as a piece of street theatre in the High Street in Winchester. Propitiously, on that particular afternoon in May 2005, there was a formal procession from the Cathedral up the High Street, in which University College Winchester was celebrating its new status, as formerly it had been King Alfred’s College of Higher Education. The entourage consisted of the Chancellor, Principal, Deputy Principals, Board of Governors, Heads of Schools, official choirs and VIP guests. The solemn, robed dignitaries found their path blocked, and had to process in single file round the student performance, in a marvellous meeting of dominant and popular cultures.

The rest is...

Like carnival with Bakhtin’s concept of ‘double-bodied’ time (1984), two time-frames have been synthesised in this project. They are a focus on early modern drama, especially *Hamlet*, and a focus on contemporary performance. There has been a continual shuffling back and forth between them. And like Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* which is also a veiled

critique of Stalinist USSR, this project has also been an investigation into the practices of the institution. The bridge between the time frames is myself, the researcher into *Hamlet* who is also a contemporary clown practitioner. The phenomenology of the practices of the clown is vital here, for it could be argued that if Shakespeare can only be understood through an historical context; then those scholars, who possess the social and political knowledge of the early modern period become the arbiters of his work, whatever their ideological position, which is an equally dominant position. Dialogicity is key here for it supports my growing investigation into my role of clown as dramaturg, and allows me to adopt a number of interwoven roles in the University. I am the oblique challenger to the practical and theoretical work, inserting myself into the situation, and playfully making suggestions, asking naïve questions. Around this core I play, both representationally and presentationally, the expert, the lecturer who plays at knowing, and has accepted the role. This develops through my institutionalised serious role, which does allow me to speak with some authority to the institution, although behind it there is the wink and the nod of the clown. The clown needs the rules of institution to operate, and in such an apparently democratic institution as the University, which combines the three pillars of the institution: the regulative, the normative, and the cultural-cognitive, the play with the rules of the institution can sometimes be open and clear, sometimes needs to be circumspect and subtle. The clown can take centre stage but only for a short while before retreating to the sidelines. The key for me here is the fluid play with clown status, which exemplifies the clowning of Hamlet in the gravedigger scene, as well as the ‘bifold authority’ of the academic and clown. The danger is that the clown’s subversive play can be ignored, as, after all, it’s only a clown. But Bristol makes an incisive point about the ‘safety valve’ theory of carnival:

For catharsis to actually work in such a reliable way, however, it would be necessary for festivals to be completely unselfconscious occasions in which nothing was ever learned, and for participants to cooperate, year after year, in an oppressive routine, contrary to their interests. (1985: 27)

The work on the module for both me and the students, despite being institutionally sanctioned and responding to the rules of the institution is neither discrete nor unselfconscious, and a

great deal has been learned, articulated and embodied, through the theory and practice of Shakespeare, carnival and clown, about the structures and practices of different institutions: theatre and performance, the University, Shakespeare, learning and teaching, and my clowning.

In the next chapter of this project I shall be further exploring and developing the concept of 'the dramaturg clown', by analysing a project I have been working on since April 2009, Fuse Performance's outdoor devised performance installation *The Village Fete*, which premiered at The Larmer Tree Festival in July 2009. Unlike the unacknowledged dramaturg in the *Hamlet* project, my role in this production was officially that of dramaturg, although I also took on a small clownesque performance role, (that of the local vicar at the fete). To undertake this project I have had to extensively research the role of dramaturg, and use this research on a project which is not based in the institution of the University, but focuses on a contemporary performance in the context of an event, a festival. The chapter will not only consider the festival as an institution but will also further discuss and develop the relationship between performance and real life which I discussed to some extent in the section 'Three's Company' in Chapter Two of this thesis, in my analysis of *The Misguided Tour*. The focus of the chapter will be on how the clown uses institutionalised space, drawing on a range of writing on space both on performance and in real life. It will develop further the idea that the clown delights in the strictures of the institution as they give creative space to the clown to playfully transgress.

Chapter Six: THE DRAMATURG CLOWN

Introduction

This chapter also attempts to tie up the threads of the preceding five chapters in a nice, tidy knot. But such is the nature of the investigation of the relationships between the clown and the institution that it will inevitably leave loose threads hanging, as well as dangly bits which have unravelled. It may even be the case that tugging on one thread will pull out the entire skein of carefully worked out reflection. Thus although this is a concluding chapter I am also aware that the ephemerality and liminality of the range of practices of the clown which I have discussed throughout this thesis and employed in my own practice is both provisional and transitional. This entire project has been an opportunity to pause and reflect on my practice since 1978, both as a practitioner and then as a teacher - practitioner in the academy. It has been a rather lengthy pause in the game of the clown, although of course the game has still continued during the pause. But the pause has allowed me to look back and reflect as well as enabling me to look beyond this into an as yet scarcely discernable future for my practice. Part of the reason for this is that the concept which I briefly sketched in Chapter Five: that a current and developing role for my clown practice, that of the dramaturg is fragile and vulnerable. I shall ground my dramaturgical practice by reflecting on a current performance project I have been undertaking throughout 2009, *The Village Fete*, a collaboration with Fuse Performance Company, in which we performed a 'real' village fete, which took place at the Larmer Tree Festival, Larmer Tree Gardens, Dorset, UK in July 2009. I had a small clownesque performance role in the production - that of the local vicar - but my other and more specific role was dramaturg for the production. In my critical reflection on this project, I shall develop a thread of this research which I have touched upon throughout this thesis, namely the use of space in the performances I have considered, not only in terms of how the space has been used in each research project, but also how the space has been a key factor in its reception by the audiences, and how the use of the space in different ways has, to some extent, driven the structure and narrative as well as the making of the performance. In addition, I shall discuss the use of metaphorical space which leads on to a consideration of how the playing, both of and in, metaphorical and real space is a site for contestation and

transgression in a carnivalesque sense. As Bakhtin observes of carnival, 'It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play' (1984: 7). Although Bakhtin is referring specifically to mediaeval carnival, this quotation aptly sums up the overall concept and starting point which we employed in the collaborative devising of *The Village Fete*, as well as reinforcing for me the ways in which the practices of the contemporary clown can challenge the practices of the institution, through a playful blurring of reality and art, which in turn problematises institutional practices and systems. Moreover this is further highlighted by those clown practices which take place in the range of unusual and non-traditional performance arenas in which the clown currently performs and which I have focussed on throughout this study.

Finally I shall suggest a range of roles and practices which the contemporary clown might adopt in his relationship to the practices of the institution. Here it is important to reiterate my opening statement of this study: namely that clown is not easily defined, and that it is through the analysis of the practices of the clown that she is best considered. Likewise, as I have outlined in Chapter Four, although the practices of institutions can be framed in various ways, institutional practices are not fixed but are porous and permeable. However, this does raise an important question which I have discussed throughout but which I shall attempt to clarify in this concluding chapter: what is unique or special about the specific practices of the clown which challenge the practices of the institution? Would not the same challenge be better made by any committed person more effectively? The long and complex history of protest and dissent has demonstrated that it might be more effectively carried out by figures that possess gravitas and authority rather than by the practices of the naïve clown. Although those with these qualities can very easily become the oppressors when they achieve power, so perhaps this is one reason for clown subversion. Nevertheless the question still remains as to the effectiveness of the critique of the institution which the clown makes. Is change effected through the absurd logic of the practices of the clown, or, as I have shown in the case with the Mimirichy clown troupe, are their teeth drawn precisely because they are permitted to playfully critique the repressive practices of the former USSR? The excuse that 'it's only a clown' cuts both ways. Mimirichy escape stricture and censorship because they can claim they are 'only clowns' and therefore harmless, but they are also marginalised, and rendered

voiceless precisely because they are clowns and therefore need not be taken seriously by those in authority.

A suggested answer to the above question is that one role of the clown is that of the innocent who accidentally blunders into situations that he does not understand and becomes through naivety the focus of protest and therefore the scapegoat; see for example, Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) in which, as the tramp figure, he inadvertently finds himself at the head of a mass demonstration, which is then broken up by the police. Chaplin has to flee, and much of the later narrative lies in his attempting to relinquish the role of leader of a protest, which he does not want and never intended to have. It could be argued that the satire here is of the foolishness and futility of mass protest, and it is certainly true that the disjunction between the clown as leader of a protest movement and as naïve fool is comic precisely because it invites these double readings. However it might also be read as a statement of the power of the innocent; that the clown is communicating directly and without inhibition what the audience thinks, and, equally importantly, feels their situation really is. This is an important function which the clown embodies, and which suggests that the practices of the clown do not necessarily change the situation, but permit their audience to recognise the situation, and, in turn, this may be an effective catalyst for others to challenge institutional practices. I am being cautious in proposing that the clown has power to effect change, but I am also considering my current personal situation. I am an academic in an institution, a university, whose practices are mostly open, and although the UK state seems to be currently becoming more repressive of the individual, under the guise of ensuring the individual's freedom, it still purports to be broadly democratic in its practices. Thus I am in the privileged position of researching clown practices, as well as pursuing my own practice, and am able to clownishly critique the institution from within.

The Village Fete

The Village Fete project is, in effect, a drawing together of the threads of practice I have been making since 1978, yet it is also a parallel project with the practice based *Fooling Hamlet* project, discussed in Chapter Four, as they were both taking place during the same period of

time (Spring/Summer 2009). The two projects are particularly appropriate for this study as they both celebrate and critique institutions which have resonance in the popular imagination throughout many parts of the world. The real village fete with its class divisions, snobberies and rivalries beneath a patina of collective endeavour is thus ripe for clown subversion and burlesque. For this project there were two key dramaturgical intentions; firstly, to blur the boundaries between the real and the fake, to make the performance fete appear as much like a real village fete as possible so that the parody was only just apparent, and secondly, to play further with the space of the performance and the ways in which it interacts with and bleeds into, the non-performed space around it. These two aims have been a key intention of my collaborative practice from 1992 in several projects: *Love Me Tender* (1992), which took place in an empty shop, *The Family Outing Caravan Holiday* (2000), which took place on a camp-site, *The Misguided Tour*, which I analysed at length in Chapter Two, and *Café Lente* (2006-7), which took place in a café. Although I was the official dramaturg for *The Village Fete*, I was also a collaborator on the devising, with other performers in the piece. In addition I was mentor for the management of the project, as well as taking the performance role noted above, the local vicar. I was both the outside observer of the rehearsal process but also inside the devising and performance process, which involved me in some difficult negotiations at times. This resonates with Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt's comments on the multiplicity of roles of the dramaturg in contemporary performance, which they consider in their book *Dramaturgy and Performance*:

The dramaturgs discussed here all negotiate the delicate position of being both a creative collaborator in the process and, at the same time, the person who has to be able to stand back, to view the work with some objectivity in order to identify overarching structures and possible narratives. (2008: 180)

Moreover, *The Village Fete* was a non-narrative piece, which blurred the line between the real and the fake, and in which the interactivity and enmeshment between the audience and the characters was vital, as audience members were invited into and shared the space with the performers. The 'attendees' dramaturgically shaped and helped create the performance event. For the heading of one section of their book, Turner and Behrndt refer to the devising

dramaturg as ‘Map maker and Compass-bearer’ (2008:176), which aptly sums up for me my practice as clown dramaturg for *The Village Fete*.

Despite Plato’s strictures in Chapters Four and Thirteen of *Republic* (1993) that plays are an imitation of an imitation and therefore doubly illusory, and to be banished from his ideal state, both theatre and performance throughout their history have been highly dependent on ‘real life’, not least in the constant attempt to represent it. Of more recent provenance is the deliberate intermingling of real life and performance, through the deconstruction of the framing of theatre itself, in order to confront audiences with an ethics of both performance and reality. I argue that a key influence on this development has been the ‘Happenings’ in the 1960s (see Kaprow 1993:15-96), most notably those of the Living Theater. Although I would argue that, whereas the Happening was similar to carnival, in that it was the antithesis of theatre, *The Village Fete* can be characterised as post-dramatic performance following Hans Thies Lehmann’s analyses in *Post-dramatic Theatre* (2006). With its mix of real life with fictional and highly theatricalised practices of narrative, character and scenography, *The Village Fete* is one project amongst a range of contemporary and recent performances which draw on real life spaces that include the inhabitants of that space, who are both a knowing and unwitting audience for their dramaturgy.

¹⁹My thinking about the dramaturgy of the interactions between the performers, audiences, and the space of *The Village Fete* has been influenced by three performances which played with these elements in different ways, and which employed, to a greater or lesser extent, many of the practices of the clown which I have identified throughout this thesis. Firstly, in my own company *fishproductions*’ *The Family Outing Caravan Holiday* (2000) the five performers (Mother, Father, two grownup daughters plus six-week-old baby) lived as a real family in a caravan on a camp site in Hampshire for one week in July. Every day we undertook the daily rituals of a family on holiday: the nightly barbecue, the daily drive to the shops, the lunchtime drink, the relaxing, the reading, the boredom, and the arguments. One of

¹⁹ The following section until the end of the first paragraph on p.172 is adapted from my article ‘Street Life’ in Max-Pryor, D. (ed.) (2003) *Street Arts: A User’s Guide*, Winchester: King Alfred’s College/Independent Street Arts Network, pp. 46-47

the significant features of this durational performance was playing to several audiences. A web-cam filmed our every moment which we then web cast on the net. Virtual audiences could read our daily dairies, interact with us in the chat room, email us ideas and scenarios, which we then incorporated into our live performances. Audiences could visit us to watch. Many came expecting a set show; instead they interacted with our lives, often staying to join in the nightly barbecue. Some returned several times to see how we were coping as well as logging on to the web site. Finally, there were the other campers, an 'accidental' audience who, at first, may not have known that we were not a real family on holiday (despite me marking the transgression by playing mother.) As in carnival the distinction between audience and performer became frequently blurred, especially in the chatroom. (Did Germaine Greer and John Major really log on?) Moreover during the course of a week we settled into the rhythms, habits and idiosyncrasies of a real family. We were not set apart from our environment but at first (or second or third glance) we were 'just like you,' whilst playing with the 'not at all like you.'

An inspirational example, which provided a contrast to *The Family Outing Caravan Holiday*, since the performance was clearly signalled as performance, took place at the London International Festival of Theatre in 1985. Alberto Vidal lived in a cage next to the apes in London Zoo for the weekend of 20th and 21st July, in his performance of *Urban Man* (1985). His cage contained the trappings of technological society: a bed, a cooker, a sink, and a desk with a computer. On the outside of the cage was the standard zoo plaque with 'Homo Urbanus' written on it, and some information about habitat, eating habits, and temperament of this species, notably the most vicious and violent on the planet. Visitors to the Zoo could observe this particular animal going about his banal daily activities: his grooming, feeding habits, rest times, play activities. Occasionally he would come to the bars of the cage and meekly offer people his card. Paradoxically, this difference between him and his environment served to heighten the similarities between him and the other animals going about their daily business. As audiences we were witnesses to behaviour, which, in this unusual context, appeared both utterly strange and yet familiar. It allowed each observer to reflect upon science, captivity, nature, nurture, self-awareness, and the ethics of gazing at animals as they performed for us, and as the audience performed for them.

Further inspiration for my dramaturgical thinking for *The Village Fete* was provided by the four members of *Urban Dream Capsule*, from Australia, which took place as part of the London International Festival of Theatre in 1999. The performers lived their daily lives for two weeks in June behind the plate glass window of Arding & Hobbs department store in Clapham Junction, London. Audiences could communicate with them through phone, fax, email, or website. In one sense they appeared shut off from the real world, shop window dummies come to life. Yet they too were living a contemporary reality, caught up in a virtual world, preferring to talk to someone on the phone rather than face to face. Consequently, whilst their performance was laugh out loud funny, (I caught them at about 11.00 p.m., as one of them was just emerging from the shower. All four then obliged us with a dance, their towels threatening to slip at any moment,) they used the tensions and subtle shifts between real life and performance to create a strong air of subversion, of deliberate unease. This was also because they emphasised the theatricality of their performance. The dance, for example, was clearly choreographed, and reminiscent of a *commedia dell'arte* lazzi. And in the fishbowl of the store, they seemed half human, half puppet, reflecting our reality as audiences back at us, in a skewed and slightly threatening manner.

These three key examples, to differing extents and in different ways, reflect, interact with, borrow from, comment upon and re-present the real life of their particular performance environment. In my view, a key factor in this borrowing was the ways in which they used particular non-theatrical and everyday places to contact and entice their audience into playing with them, and, perhaps not deliberately, shifting their expectations of what a performance is and might be. What was common to all of these, as often happens with performance in non-theatrical places, was that an audience member might stumble upon them by accident, as I did with *Urban Dream Capsule* - hearing shrieks of laughter as I was about to catch a train at Clapham Junction station. The differences between them are evidenced in the ways in which the audience interacts with and is enmeshed in the performance. None of them appeared to have an explicit socio-political aim as in, for example, Augusto Boal's well-known practice of 'Invisible Theatre' described in *Games for Actors and Non-actors* (1992), in which actors intervene in real life situations and environments to provoke a debate with an unknowing audience with the clear intention of challenging and changing attitudes to particular injustices

and social practices, such as racism, sexism and homophobia. However, through the use of the practices of the clown, especially the complicity with the audience and the permission granted by the audience to transgress, all three examples encompassed parodic and provocative, yet playful confrontations between performer and audience, which asked the spectator individually and collectively to consider their relationship to current issues, without specifically highlighting or revealing them.

With regard to *The Village Fete*, recently there has been a great deal of interest in what is meant by 'Englishness', a debate which permeates many areas of contemporary life, such as class, immigration, 'broken' Britain, and our relationship to Europe. This rather vague yet potent concept became a hook for exploring and presenting a debate about class, politics and tradition through the performance of *The Village Fete*. For the project it was vital however that these issues were not signalled nor presented to the public but played with and revealed through clownesque improvisation and enmeshment. It is noteworthy that the context for *The Village Fete* was the Larmer Tree Festival, a fairly small three day festival of approximately 5000 people, encompassing world music, stand-up comedy, street theatre, and workshops. From my previous experience of performing there, the core audience would be composed of adults and children of all ages, mostly white, and in my estimation fairly well-off. This audience would first and foremost want to be entertained, although, from past experience, they would be discerning, knowledgeable and quite critical. Issues around the institutions of class and Englishness therefore needed to be artfully embedded and implicit in the performance rather than explicitly stated. There are many such festivals of this nature which currently take place over the summer in the UK. Despite their roots in the radical politics of the 1960s, such as Woodstock, they have become an acceptable and institutionalised form of entertainment in the UK. In the case of the Larmer Tree Festival itself, it is especially ironic that the Larmer Tree Festival takes place in what was originally a Victorian Pleasure Gardens, in Dorset, built on the fruits of Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. Empire, capital and religion are reflected in its architecture and design. For example, there is a facsimile of an 'Indian' pavilion. The pleasure gardens provided a day out for the working classes and at the same time reminded them of their place, whilst hinting at a world of wealth and luxury that they

could not possibly attain. The performance of *The Village Fete* was then a clown re-inscription of a re-inscription.

For the clown whose interaction with the audience is key and whose method of making the performance is frequently by trying out material in front of an audience, much like the stand-up comedian, the audience helps shape the clown performance, and so plays a dramaturgical role. A standard method used by many companies to get audience feedback, is to present a rough draft of the performance to an audience for feedback and comment. This method was formalised by Battersea Arts Centre, London in 2001, under the name of 'Scratch Nights'. In this case a monthly performance event was held for companies and individuals to present ideas and short pieces of work, usually of no more than ten minutes, to the public and invited friends and colleagues, who were then asked to give their feedback to the company, usually through a discussion after the showing in which the company asked questions of the audience about the ways that they might develop the rough work. This was the method used by Marcello Magni for his one man show, *Arlecchino and Zanni* (2003), which drew on and contemporised the characters of the *commedia dell'arte*. He developed it with his collaborators, Jos Houben and Kathryn Hunter, over the period of a year, presenting successively longer drafts of work in progress at Battersea Arts Centre. He asked for detailed audience response at each stage, before performing the finished piece at Battersea Arts Centre and then touring it throughout Europe.

The 'scratch' method is appealing to performers and seems to be effective in at least allowing public performances to be given before presenting the production to a general public, who may be much more critical. Although without more extensive research into the subject it is impossible to discover how much the feedback from the public has actually fed into the development of the work. It is also most suitable for those styles of performance in which the spatial separation between audience and performer is clearly delineated. This separation permits the audience to observe the fictional world of the performer from their position in the real world, although the performers may cross that divide, and there may be a complex dramaturgy of space and a mingling of 'locus' and 'platea'. Although a showing of a rough draft of *The Village Fete* with an invited audience was discussed, the decision was taken not to

do this, since it was clear that because the event dissolved the separation between audience and performer, so that the actual performance space was shared with the attendees, there was no actual audience as such. They were more properly understood as attendees who could behave as they wished whilst at the event: wander about at random, engage with the stall holders, sift through bric a brac, play the bottle game, fish for a plastic duck, or have their fortune told by the vicar's wife. However, there was set entertainment consisting of a ukulele trio, a folk singer, and a belly dancer, which the audience could sit on the grass and watch, although the fete still continued around them. They could stay for as long or as short a time as they wished. At times there were announcements from the organisers, and an opening ceremony with a celebrity from the Larmer Tree Festival itself; (on the first day it was Radio 2 DJ, Johnnie Walker). All eleven performers adopted various characters as local villagers, and a hierarchy and status was employed, which played upon the snobberies and petty feuds to be found at such an event. Most performers had dual roles, for example, the belly dancer also ran the WaterAid UK stall. This created another reality outside the performance as WaterAid is a real charity, and all money made at the fete was given to it.

This necessitated a radical change of position for the individual audience member from the role of observer of the drama to that of participant in and, vitally, constructor and on the spot dramaturg of the event. It also required a radically different mode of playing and understanding of playing from the performers in that they acted realistic characters, with close up interactions between each other and the attendees, but were improvising and devising in the moment as well. It was also perfectly possible for an attendee to be unaware that this was a fake, clownesque version of a village fete. Dramaturgically this was highly challenging, not only because we were in uncharted performance territory, but also because there was the marrying of a real randomness of the fete, with scenes where the attendees were gathered together to spectate as a group. For example, the audience were all brought together at the end for the drawing of the raffle and the prizes, (bottles of British wine amongst other appropriate items,) were handed out to the winners. As often happens in reality, a winner's ticket was called, but they had already left the fete. This created an opportunity for comic hesitation, argument, and mix-up.



A real raffle with real prizes, Larmer Tree Festival 2009

There are similar precedents for using the audience as an unknowing dramaturgical collective and it often occurs for popular performances which take place outside a designated theatre building. This is particularly true for the street performers at Covent Garden; not only for those whose acts, such as clowns, require the interaction with and the liveness of the audience to work, but also for the jugglers and unicyclists as well. Although it can be argued that the Covent Garden outdoor space is actually a privately owned, officially validated theatre space, where performers have to audition and abide by codes of conduct, so that the venue is an attraction for the public, nevertheless the street performers tend to see themselves, and tend to be regarded by the public, as renegade performers outside the officially sanctioned cultural industry. Official systems of criticism and validation, such as the first night, the previews, the press showings, and the critics are almost entirely absent. Performers have to rely on the reactions of the audience to provide the dramaturgical feedback. So for example, Jean Louis Bondoux, a champion French ice skater performed a fall-apart bicycle clown entrée on a tour

with Zippo and Company in 1983, having previously performed in the ice show *Holiday on Ice*. His persona was that of the tramp clown, and his act was reminiscent of the bicycle act of the American tramp clown of Joe Jackson Senior from the early twentieth century, described by John Towsen in *Clowns* (1976: 290-291). When Jean Louis performed his entrée in the very large space outside St Paul's Church in Covent Garden in 1984, it proved rather too wistful, delicate and subtle for the audience of shoppers and tourists who watched for a couple of minutes before walking away; it was not, to use Peter Brook's terminology, 'rough' enough. Jean Louis later confided to me, in a conversation which occurred, I vaguely remember, in the back of the van going from one show to another, that quite quickly he had learnt from the reactions of the audience how to adapt his act to draw and keep the crowd. He also noted that, despite the intense rivalry and competition from the other performers for audiences and therefore money in the hat, the other performers had been very helpful in their suggestions of how he might develop his act for this particular space and audience (1984). It should be noted that one aim, amongst others, of the street performers in Covent Garden is to build up and hold as large a crowd as possible, increasing their 'hat' money, so solely by staying there the audience gives a great deal of dramaturgical feedback.

For *The Village Fete* the proposed relationship between performers and audience was perhaps a more radical encounter than any of the above examples, in that the power of creating and controlling the performance during its event, was, to a large extent, handed over to the spectator cum attendee. The enmeshment developed beyond the concept of *The Misguided Tour*, as the performers were not guiding or directing the audience, who could act as they wished during it. Neither were the attendees witnesses to the event, as in much Live Art or Performance Installation, as this implies that they adopt an objective, even passive, stance towards the event on their part, which was certainly not the intention for *The Village Fete*. Quite simply there needed to be interplay and a shared secret recognition on the part of both the attendees and the performers that the attendees had to do things for the events of the fete to unfold, although there was little direction as to what they should do; and it may have included standing watching as well. For their part the performers were not ignorant: they possessed knowledge that they were performing and were aware of the overall shape of the event, but to reiterate, the specific actions, interventions and provocations of the performance were

improvised during the time of the performance with the attendees. The dramaturgy was made more complex in that on the one hand the performance needed a looseness of narrative and structure where the attendees could become involved as much as they wished, and on the other hand a precise delineation of character and mode of playing was required from the performers, which veered between and encompassed the real and the unreal, and was comic and clownesque. The dramaturgical key to this difficult demand was discovered through the playing of and with the performance space, and in the devising, rehearsal, and actual performance, the play with space and interaction with audience was much discussed and puzzled over. At times our common understanding was clear and our discussion about how and why to play space was very precise; at other times there was confusion, and how *The Village Fete* might be performed seemed obscure and elusive.

My thinking about the dramaturgy of space has been clarified by Duška Radosavljević's essay, *The Need to Keep Moving: Remarks on the place of a dramaturg in twenty-first century England* in 'Performance Research' (2009). This essay provides a helpful paradigm which may be applied to the dramaturgy of *The Village Fete*. In particular Radosavljević uses the writings of Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), which I have considered previously in Chapter Two of this study, to frame her own understanding of her dramaturgical role. She takes his 'two modes of description' (Radosavljević 2009: 50) of the 'map' and the 'tour', which de Certeau discusses in the chapter 'Spatial Stories' (1984: 115-130), '...the map' – the official organization of a series of 'facts' about a particular space – and 'the tour' – an account of a journey through the space' (2009:50). She sees her practice as dramaturg as the tour guide to the performance, whereas in her view the director is the map maker. This coincides with my view of my dramaturgical role for the project, but can also be applied as a framework for understanding how the arrangement of the performance space was played by the performers and spectators. This is especially pertinent as we had taken audiences on a tour as performance in *The Misguided Tour*.

The performance space for *The Village Fete* was the map, and in fact in our discussions about the site we did spend quite a bit of time sketching a map of the site and where the various stalls and objects would be placed. Superimposed upon the map however, the attendees and

performers could trace their tour, which could be meandering, wayward and eccentric, according to the individual's inclination. Since John Lee, Sally Mann and I had been tour guides in *The Misguided Tour*, the concept of a tour in which the spectator becomes their own tour guide has a great deal of resonance. De Certeau maintains that the map is officially sanctioned and static, whereas the tour is nomadic and unofficial. In my view the clownesque dramaturgy of this space allowed both performers and attendees to play in a carnivalesque mixing of roles and relationships; map and tour are not distinct entities but both are fluid and uncircumscribed. My claim is that this is innovative in terms of theatre and performance as, unlike the 'Happenings' of the 1960s, *The Village Fete* is a fiction which nevertheless blurs reality and performance. It also takes place in a precisely delineated space, with a fictive space superimposed upon it, unlike the carnival space which remains real. In addition the precise map of the space is altered by the spectator, who uses the space as they wish. This continual blurring of function and form is made possible by the clown performers, whose mode of playing allowed the performance to unfold, which in turn allowed the attendees to play. This further blurred the line between the knowingness of the naïve performers and the accidental attendee performers. Bakhtin states that the clown in carnival is in a liminal space between life and artifice (1984:7). I would argue that both attendees and performers in *The Village Fete* existed in this liminal space, and thus all became, to varying degrees, clowns. It is true that the performance event was contained within a safe space, which was, to some extent sealed off from the outside enculturated space of the Festival, which was in turn sealed off from the everyday life of the street. But for the three hours duration of *The Village Fete*, the space became a phenomenological space in which the clown was not banished to the side, as in the circus, and who is sometimes permitted to enter the ring. Instead the clown became one protagonist amongst others, the attendees, who sometimes took centre stage and sometimes played unobserved on the margins. The dramaturgy recognised a multiplicity of perspectives and voices which co- created the performance event of *The Village Fete* during its unfolding.

The dramaturg clown

In summarising the practices of the dramaturg clown I have drawn upon the practices and projects which I have analysed throughout this thesis. In considering them I shall make three

claims. Through the writing of this thesis I have been tracing the threads of my practice, reflecting upon the shifting nature of that clown practice, and considering various relationships of my practice to practices within a range of institutions – the circus, the theatre, the university, the prison, the tour, and the village fete. At the heart of this undertaking is a focus on the different ways in which the clown plays with and transgresses the space in which she is permitted to play by those institutions. This creates space for the clown to play with the practices of the institutions. It is clear that this reflection is therefore a subjective view of a vast range of clown practices. Although I have discussed and critiqued others' opinions and definitions of the clown and the clown's practice, in the end I am basing this clown's eye view on my personal perspectives. My practice since 1978 has broadly moved through a number of stages, the most obvious that of moving away from the clown performer and the creator of my own clown persona and material, to that of the dramaturg clown, who applies the techniques of the clown to develop the clown practices of others and myself individually and collaboratively. As I have described and analysed in this chapter, *The Village Fete* project has been a new direction in my clown practice, and yet it links back to the description of the young boy clowning, untutored and seemingly for his own amusement, on Bournemouth beach. However imperfectly rendered and filtered though the haze of memory the link is that of the practice of the clown who is naively playing with and in the space. Yet circling around that naïve play is the institution of control, in the form of the grandfather who does not hesitate to make money out of it, (although egg and chips seemed then as a just reward for that play, and still does).

My second claim which has underpinned much of my thinking is that although this analysis of my practice is a personal view, nevertheless in my view the trajectory of my practice over the last thirty years does broadly reflect wider clown practices within a context of huge social and political change. I started at a time when the figure of the clown assumed an increasing importance for theatre practitioners, especially in the development of alternative theatre in the UK during the 1970s. And although the so-called alternative comedy movement at the end of the 1970s eventually relied mainly on verbal humour for its material, which meant that stand-up, the man with the microphone, became the dominant form of comedy, nevertheless there was a renewed interest in and drawing upon the techniques of clowning, and other popular forms, which were visible in the performances of alternative theatre and

performance companies of the early 1980s, as many, though by no means all, of these companies had overtly political aims and were critical of the ethos and aims of the Thatcher government, most notably the dismantling of the welfare state and wholesale privatisation of state run enterprises, such as the coal mining industries which they supported (Itzin 1980; Kershaw 1992). The clowning of Zippo and Company was not explicitly political although we were supportive of the politics of protest. Many of our early performances were at the festivals set up by the Greater London Council, a body which, under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, was directly critical of the Thatcher government. At the same time there developed a tendency for theatre, comedy and performance to take place outside traditional theatre spaces, so performances took place in unusual venues, such as pub bars, converted churches, village halls and at political rallies, such as the 'Rock against Racism' events in Hyde Park in 1981. From this alternative soil my own practice grew, and on this subjective level, the seeds of this practice are still evident in my current practice. The subversion has always been oblique and playful, rather than overt and oppositional.

Thirdly, the initial title of this chapter was 'The clown as dramaturg, the dramaturg as clown', which suggests that I have adopted the mask of the dramaturg, to play the role of the dramaturg when it is appropriate. However, on reflection, I maintain that my current practice is that of dramaturg clown - in other words the clown is also and always a dramaturg - and my practice of dramaturg effectively uses a range of clown practices. The suggestions I make as dramaturg look at the dramatic problem obliquely and are framed in the context of institutional practice. Although the distinction between 'as' and 'is' is subtle, nevertheless in my view it is vital that this distinction is made, and it is recognised that in my practice both clown and dramaturg are fused. In other words, for me this is not a temporary adoption of another clown mask, as in playing the dramaturgical role whilst still remaining the clown, but that the clown is also the dramaturg of my own and others' practice. The practice of dramaturgy may occur unconsciously during a performance, in response to the performance situation. Alternatively it may be employed consciously as a reflection on a specific practice or performance, either during the making of the performance, or after each performance. Even when there is no one person who has the role of dramaturg, and there is no explicit dramaturgical practice there is still a dramaturgy in the making of the performance. It may be a dramaturgical focus on

specific moments of a particular performance, and as well it may involve a dramaturgical contextualisation of a wider society in which the particular performance takes place. In many cases these dramaturgical practices are fused together and it is difficult to separate them. As Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt write in *Dramaturgy and Performance*, 'If 'dramaturgy' is a word we use when we discuss structural, compositional and contextual principles of a work, and the ideas and narratives that drive these principles, it may have applications beyond drama or indeed, the theatre' (2008:36). They note that T.R. Young and Garth Massey, '...are sociologists who extend the idea of dramaturgy beyond the theatre, writing about a 'dramaturgical society' ...' (2008:36). I contend that the dramaturg clown extends the praxis beyond the theatre to also become the dramaturg clown of the social.

From my experience as dramaturg on both the making of *The Village Fete* and on working with students on clownesque versions of *Hamlet*, I therefore propose that there are a number of specific clown practices that synthesise with the practices of the dramaturg, to create the distinctive features and methods of what I term the dramaturg clown. I shall now attempt to separate and define them, although, of course, in practice often several clown practices were operating together, and were bound up with each other. Consequently, what follows is a guide to a developing range and roles of practices rather than an all-inclusive schema of dramaturgical applications.

As I have emphasised throughout, the ability of the clown to move between the fictional world of the performance and the real world of the audience is a vital dramaturgical tool. In the case of *The Village Fete*, the fictional and the real worlds are deliberately mixed and confused, so that the separation between both is not apparent. Throughout the devising process my dramaturgical method reflected this, as it veered between a number of poles: the serious, reflective and considered, and the playful and foolish, where I proposed absurd and clownesque scenarios and situations for the actors to improvise around. Since I was also one of the performers, this further blurred the way of working, as I was both inside the making of the performance as well as the outside eye and observer, although it was important for me not to blur the roles too much. In one rehearsal, for example, it was proposed by Sally Mann that all the characters would enact the planning of the fete in character, much as a real committee

might. As both dramaturg and clown vicar I was both inside and outside the improvisation, whilst also remaining aware of the play between performers, and the development of content and relationships, so that I could discuss the dramaturgical choices with the director, John Lee, after the improvisation.

Very much bound up with the concept of being inside/outside the performance event, is the concept of the clown as a marginal figure, who is not central to the events but remains at the edge of the action, although he or she may briefly take a central role, especially when this central role is thrust upon them. The dramaturg clown deliberately employs the marginality as a method for the practice of dramaturgy. This is at its clearest in the student performances of *Hamlet*, in which I did not give them instructions as to how the groups should present their performances, but attempted to make oblique and parodic suggestions as to the ways in which they might think about their practice. In other words I performed as the clown whilst being the dramaturg. I am conscious that this method is borrowed from the teaching of Philippe Gaulier, who uses a disconcerting and sometimes cruel humour in his work with his students. For example, during his 'stage' on clown he frequently asked for a volunteer to play, only to dismiss them with a spurious reason, ('too tense') as soon as they stood up. The next time the student stood up, expecting to be dismissed straightaway, Gaulier would often playfully keep them waiting for a very long time. Sometimes this would have the desired effect of the student doing some wonderful improvisation precisely because of their desperate uncertainty. In my own case, however, I am far less cruel than Gaulier in my comments, both because of my conviction that this can be unhelpful, and also because I simply do not work this way - it's not my method. However, what I have taken from Gaulier is the conviction that there is great pleasure in being foolish and an idiot, and I attempt to convey this as the dramaturg clown.

This tool of a playful and oblique clowning, stemming from the marginal place of the clown, is at the core of the dramaturg clown. During the making of *The Village Fete* I used this both as a specific method and as a general mode of approach to the practice of dramaturgy. This approach should be qualified by noting that the practices of the dramaturg clown are most appropriate for those performances that are not specifically theatrical. The clear separation between stage and audience, and consequent consideration of the real and the fake are

challenged and revealed. As well as this, the dramaturg clown is suited to modes of acting, which do not attempt to correspond to realism, but are presented as a commentary upon acting itself, much as in Hamlet's advice to the Players (3.2.1-43) and in all the performances I have discussed in this thesis. However, whilst there is not a sense of realism, there is, in my opinion, a sense of authenticity, in that the clown naively states the truth through play. What must be acknowledged is that the dramaturg clown uses the specialist knowledge of, and expertise in, the numerous practices of the clown I have identified throughout. In my own case I am using my knowledge of institutional practices, and the ways in which the clown may appropriate the fissures, cracks, and absurdities of the institution as a framework for clown play. This was evident throughout devising of *The Village Fete* as the aim, as I have noted above, was to highlight the tensions and illogical certainties of an English institution, creating for an afternoon a carnivalesque performance event.

Clearly, as outlined above, my concept of the dramaturg clown is a niche role, and is subsumed within the more general practices and roles of the dramaturg, which the dramaturg clown also employs. But to sum up, there are four overlapping fields of practice in which the dramaturg clown operates. Firstly, there is a level of what I term meta-dramaturgy, which is the practice of reflection and writing by the dramaturg clown and whose voice is included at times within this thesis. I have also used the dramaturg clown in the writing of this thesis to select and analyse a range of practices in order to comment upon my own and others' clown practice in the institutions in which they find themselves. The practices have been a small selection amongst a huge range, but the selection has been carefully made to suit the focus of the project. Secondly, the standard understanding of the practices of the dramaturg are of those which are used in assisting the making of a performance; the dramaturg is a professional who works alongside other theatre professionals and is subject to the demands of the institution of theatre. I have used the playful and protean nature of the clown, to challenge and critique both the methods of making performance as well as of the elements of that particular performance, as I have described in my discussion in the *Fooling Hamlet* chapter. Thirdly, in *The Village Fete*, I have used the practices of the dramaturg clown to consider the ways in which the relationship between the clown performer and the clown's audience might be extended beyond McManus's (2003:14) claim that the clown steps out of the fictional world of the play into the

real world of the audience. In this project the dramaturg clown helps make a performance in which the boundaries between audience and performer dissolve, and where for a short time all is carnivalesque play. Fourthly, by considering the ways in which the clown relates to the practices of the institution and institutionalised space I have used clown practices, most notably those of 'le jeu', 'complicity' 'enmeshment' and 'reciprocity' to challenge and subvert the practices of the institution, as I have analysed in the section on *Ubu the King* in Chapter Four.

In this chapter I have discussed and explored the uses the clown makes of space, especially non-traditional performance spaces, and how the clownesque uses of this space challenges and subverts institutionally claimed space in different ways. These performances mix real life with the fictional as I have been moving towards in my practice, but it must be admitted that there are troubling questions about the effectiveness of the practices of the clown in confronting the huge issues that the planet faces today: global warming, and globalisation amongst others. To give one example, in her book *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century* (2009) Anna Minton describes the ways in which private companies are, through mainly legal but sometimes illegal means, expropriating public spaces in cities in the UK to turn them into shopping malls or gated communities. These privately owned spaces might then allow the public to enter them, especially if they are shopping malls and the public are consumers. Whilst private companies have taken great care to make the spaces appear attractive and clean, nevertheless there are constraints on the behaviour of the public, as well as on those who can enter the space, such as tramps and teenagers. These constraints are enforced by rigorous security systems, which include installing CCTV cameras and security guards who have the powers to spy on, arrest and detain people whom they think are not behaving appropriately. This expropriation of public space by private companies is fairly common knowledge, and is continuing apace despite media and public concern, but although the naïve, playful and participatory clown practices I have described and analysed are useful in subverting these practices, these institutions are extremely monolithic and monologic. The confrontational and provocative play of Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) or the Surveillance Camera Players could and sometimes have performed in these spaces, but what is becoming increasingly problematic is that these privately expropriated spaces are not

only real spaces but are also virtual spaces inside our consciousness where they are accepted and where it is becoming almost inconceivable that things should be different.

The dramaturg clown draws together the range of disparate and contradictory practices which I have analysed throughout the thesis. It is however important to sound a note of caution, for any claim that the subversive and transgressive practices of the clown actually change the practices of the institution as a result is impossible to judge. It should be acknowledged that the subversively playful practices of the clown require a wider institution as a context for those practices, so that subversive play can occur. The clown needs the institution whereas it is clear that the institution does not necessarily require the practices of the clown. Moreover the institution, as I have noted throughout, may permit the subversion or even adopt the subversion encompassing it within their own practice, as was the case with the mediaeval Church, which encouraged the mass by the fools, but still continued its repressive practices as Barbara Ehrenreich argues in *Dancing in the Streets* (2007: 77-80). This is not intended as a defeatist position or to say that the clowns should call a halt to their critique and subversion of institutional practices using parody and laughter as their tools. As I discussed in the analysis of *Ubu the King* in the prison, the clown plays a very important role in transgressing the chains of cause and effect. And, of course, change in institutions does occur, and the clown's subversion, along with all the other challenges to repressive institutional practices, may help these changes to happen.

Clown subversion can also serve as a reminder and a check on past and current evils and injustices. For example, in his recent television travels, *Paul Merton in Europe* (2010), the comedian and silent film comedy aficionado, Paul Merton was in Germany and filmed a rally by the 'Apfel Partei' ('Apple Party') outside the headquarters of the neo-Nazi party in Berlin. Their insignia, flags and uniforms were very similar to that of the Nazi party except that the symbol on their paraphernalia was a large apple, and their rally cry was 'Apfelsaft' ('Apple juice'). They were, however, a troupe/troop of clowns parodying Hitler and the Nazi party, and reminding onlookers that the neo-Nazis had not suddenly sprung from nowhere but had a long and evil genealogy. As their 'leader' stated, they wanted not only to demonstrate the idiocy of the current neo-Nazi party but also to remind Germans of the atrocities that were

committed by Germans in the name of the Nazi party. Whether this instance of clownesque subversion is effective in changing the situation and stopping the disturbing rise of neo-Nazism is perhaps beside the point. It is instrumental in that it is a reminder of repression, and in a comic way shows people that there is the possibility that things could and should be otherwise. At the very least clown subversion and parody is active; it is not a passive acceptance of the status quo, it is after all about doing something to change the way things are. Clown subversion has an important ontological function. Its justification is that it simultaneously reminds the spectators and the passing public that things need not be like this, and equally as important neither need things be so serious. Clown play within and with institutions is about the potentiality of change as much as with actual change.

I maintain that there is a limit to the effectiveness of clown subversion I have analysed throughout this project. This is because the particular clown practices I have described and with which I have been associated as performer, teacher and dramaturg, have not been openly confrontational of institutional practices but have engaged with institutions in less open, possibly more subtle, ways. It seems clear to me that throughout my practice I have engaged with and have a preference for those practices that demonstrate and actively use the marginality of the clown, by which I mean as a figure that is both inside the play and outside the play of the drama. Sometimes the inside and outside occur simultaneously, as in *The Village Fete*, but at other times the clowns have been banished from the centre of the play, to the edges of the play, where they continue to clown, albeit circumspectly. This describes the play of Zippo and Company in the Circus, as well as the clown play by the students in *Hamlet*. Paradoxically, by being banished to the margins but continuing to clown, the clowns turn the centre itself into the margins, and the margins into the centre, if only for fleeting moments. In a sense the clowns are always offstage waiting to come on for their turn. This is not only confined to clowns in the circus, but may be seen in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett 1956), and *Hamlet*. In *Waiting for Godot* Estragon and Vladimir are both marginal and yet central, and it is easy to imagine a production in which the setting is actually the backstage area of the theatre. Whilst waiting for their entrance into the greater action which is happening onstage the tramps continue to do the only thing they know, that is, clown. In *Hamlet*, there are momentous political events and power-brokering between nations circling the almost domestic

action of the tragedy, which makes the personal and individual events of this small circle seem marginal. Yet the centrality of the ontological debates threaded through the play links the personal with the political.

My partiality for the marginality of clown play in my own practice has been affirmed by the practices of the numerous other clown practices I have discussed throughout this project. Thus the entrées of the Mimirichy and Vladimir Olshansky, which I described in Chapter Three, are critical of the former USSR, but have done this through metaphorical means rather than by confrontational clown subversion. They do not criticise the former USSR openly, but ask the audience to read their subtext about persecution and freedom in their entrées, which are to all appearances clown play and slapstick. The spectator is asked to understand their performance on two levels simultaneously. The overt and therefore official reading is absolutely there and obvious for all to see, but is continually subverted and challenged by an unofficial meaning. This subversion is not esoteric, but is likewise obvious, but because the clowns are innocents and foolish, it is difficult to openly accuse them of subversion. As I and others have also argued, the space for clown play is a subversive space also. At the very least, the clowns physically move out of the fictional world into the reality of the audience. In some cases, such as *The Village Fete* and *The Misguided Tour*, the fictional becomes the real because the audience incorporates themselves into the world set up by the clowns. This is further complicated in the case of Palfi the Laughologist, whom I discussed in Chapter Three. His clownesque practice make him a doubly marginal figure, as in his performance he slips backwards and forwards between clown and person, making it difficult to distinguish between when he is performing as a clown and when he is not. For Palfi the portal between the world of the clown and the everyday is always partly open. He blurs and marginalises self and performs in a marginal space between that of the performance and that of the audience.

Palfi's protean clown practice, in which all is in a state of flux, enables me to return to summarise the range of practices of the clown in the institution of the University of Winchester. The University is both an actual space in the city of Winchester, UK, but also is representative of the idea of a University; it is a metaphorical space. Furthermore it is a space within a wider space of the region and the United Kingdom, and responds to pressures and

initiatives external to the University, and in fact works with external bodies and institutions. It is evident that the influences, projects, performances and methods of clown practices I have researched and written about, stem from this wider social context. The relationships between these elements have been viewed through the lens of my individual tracing of my clown practices throughout a period of research, reflection, analysis and critique, which has occurred in the institution of the University. Although my choice of practices and projects seems to have been arbitrary to some extent, they have been selected because of the focus on institutions and institutional practices. In my view one of the key practices for the clown in the institution is that it has enabled my focused reflection on a diverse, changeable, and messy range of performances, teaching and projects, whose common factor is that of the clown. Without the practices of the institution this would not have occurred. And it is certainly true that it is as a direct result of this reflection and analysis the opportunity to work with students on a range of clown projects has developed. These include specific modules within the University, such as *Popular Traditions* and the ongoing research into *Fooling Hamlet*, which I have discussed at length in Chapter Five, but changes each year and will still occur after I have completed this thesis. The research into the clown and the institution encompasses also the external project of *Ubu the King* in HMP West Hill, which is doubly institutional as it occurred under the auspices of both the prison and the University of Winchester.

Beyond this I have had the opportunity to teach clown practice and theory in a number of other undergraduate and more recently, post-graduate, modules on different programmes. What my input has achieved at this level and in these pockets of practice, is that it has helped create a culture in which the practice of popular forms of theatre and performance, clown practices amongst them, are debated, discussed, theorised and practiced in the University. This does cross over with the explorations of the practices of the clown with other areas of contemporary practice. Both *The Village Fete* and *The Misguided Tour* have drawn upon crossover practices of live-art and site-based practice to create hybrid forms which explore the roles of the clown in the twenty-first century. These numerous clown practices have to some extent been assimilated and validated by the institution. They have been neatly turned into proper and formal subjects of study and delivered in bite-sized chunks on modules, complete with learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Accordingly, my clown practices have helped

develop the research culture of the University and by extension the ways in which the modern University is viewed as a knowledge producer in all of its subject areas. For example, the sharing of the knowledge I have gained throughout this project has contributed to the teaching and ethos of two new programmes: an MA in Popular Performance and a new BA in Street Arts. This project has been only a part of this development, although my contribution has been significant, and much work has been done by other colleagues and students.²⁰

On the one hand these initiatives have come from the ground upwards, that is from individual staff working with students, and, whilst conforming to institutionally approved validation and quality processes, have slipped through these procedures in acts of clown play. As an advocate for popular performance in general and clowning in particular, I am extremely happy that this has been achieved by me and others. But then I ask myself: if the institution has assimilated these practices so readily, has there been any challenge to or subversion of the institution? Clearly in the context of the ‘total’ institution of the prison, clown play is a vital tool not only for subversion but also, in some senses, for survival. The subversive practices are much less apparent in the institution of the University which is much less ‘regulative’ and much more ‘normative’ and ‘cultural-cognitive’, in Scott’s schema that I described in Chapter Four. The key word here I think is ‘apparent’, for although the business of the University is carried out much more through negotiation than coercion in comparison to HMP West Hill, and creativity in the arts is highly valued by the University of Winchester, nevertheless the space for all forms of play is still circumscribed by the evaluative, and is driven by what can be measured and tested. The practices of the University are, of course, circumscribed by these regulations from the state, and it is becoming ever more impossible to discover the origins of these regulations. But the various practices of the clown I have described and analysed, as well as many others, therefore have a role in reminding the people within the institution that things could be otherwise.

For example, in November 2009, the students on the BA Street Arts programme, created a performance, at the end of which they processed. There were stilt-walkers, acrobats and clowns amongst them, followed by their audience. They weaved through the campus gathering

²⁰ This isn’t an acknowledgements page by the way. So they shall remain nameless.

more audience members from the onlookers, eventually leading their audience back to the reception area. At one point the procession went past a meeting room in which a ‘serious’ committee meeting was taking place. The performers did not interrupt or make any contact with those on the committee, but over the course of a couple of minutes just passed by. For a minute, the members of the committee turned to watch. They became spectators, and their faces relaxed, some of them smiled, a couple even waved, before turning frowning back to the important business of reading papers, itemising agendas and preparing minutes.

So I return to Frost and Yarrow:

The clown plays. The clown plays the realities of what and where and with whom he finds himself to be. He cannot know those realities in advance, for so much of it depends upon us, the audience, that it cannot be pre-planned. Everything is *new* to the clown. (1990: 68/9; Frost and Yarrow’s italics)

What is interesting is that just at that moment everything was new to the people in the committee, and there was the enormous pleasure in that it was an accidental, unplanned meeting. It would have been horrendous if the meeting had been deliberately interrupted by a clown, or if the University had employed a fool to enliven dull meetings. In that moment the institution needed the clowns just as the clowns needed the institution to process in the first place. Even though they were separated from the performance by walls and windows, the members of the committee accepted the marginalities of space and identity which were occurring as they purposefully worked. It is as though the playful space of the practices of the clown return us to the playfulness of childhood where the real and the fictional are brought together imaginatively, and where serious activity is both play and seriousness at the same time.

For me who is currently a teacher – practitioner in the University of Winchester the shifting and fluid practices of the clown have meshed with the shifting and various roles of the dramaturg clown. In fact the dramaturg and clown are encompassed within each other. Because of this the range of practices of the dramaturg clown is not easily identifiable,

although this entire project has been an attempt to unpick them. They have ranged from a role as dramaturg of performance by students, but also, as I have been at pains to demonstrate throughout, as clown who is also a dramaturg of the complex social structures that make up the different institutions within which we are enmeshed. Having dismantled and separated the practices out, inspected and reflected upon them, what remains for me to do next is to put them back together again. Of course, as I am a clown I am certain that the resulting object will not resemble what I started out with in the first place.

CONCLUSION

This conclusion provides a restatement of the overall themes of this project, and also identifies ways in which the roles of the clown remain pertinent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This exploration of the clown's relationship to the institution began from a conundrum that I have been attempting to grapple with throughout my practice from 1978, firstly as a practitioner of clown, and later from 2000 as a practitioner academic in a university. My practice and research from the beginning and later in the University has focussed in large part, although not exclusively, on current practices of the clown, both my own and others. My argument stems from this basic conundrum which may be restated quite simply: attempts to define the clown, to say what a clown is, are problematic. In other words I freely admit that I am unable to define the clown, and am ignorant, although I know a clown when I see one. This is both because of the protean nature of the clown persona, but also because the clown exists through a relationship with a particular institution or institutions, and can only be defined through the nature of that relationship. In other words the clown is what the clown does. The does that the clown does is in a state of becoming, and the clown may be viewed phenomenologically, as Lecoq does in his practical exploration of clown, and as the oft-repeated quote by Frost and Yarrow above demonstrates. However, as Dario Fo observes in *Tricks of the Trade* (1991:148) with reference to Lecoq, the clown must also be considered as a performer whose practice is based in a specific socio-cultural environment, and should not be viewed without considering the relationship to that environment, and nor should the clown simply clown; the clown needs to say something. A vital role of the clown, both historically and currently, is as a playful critic of those socio-cultural practices. In this thesis I have considered the roles of the clown and her relationship to a range of institutions. It follows that the more clearly defined, and hence inflexible or total, the practices of institution are, the easier it becomes to identify and define the practices of the clown. When I started taking my first faltering steps in professional clowning with Attic Theatre Company on Brighton Beach for two weeks in August 1975, I had a mental picture of what a clown looked like. As I recall, it was a cross between a Pierrot and a Whiteface, yet in the doing over those two weeks I quickly learnt that, whilst the visual look of the clown is important, of more importance are the practices.

If I am correct in the above statement that it is possible to define the clown only through the individual practices of a clown within the framework of a specific institution, then I would argue that any writing about clown needs to avoid definitions as much as possible in favour of analysis of practice based explorations. This is an impossible task and so there is a marrying of references to the possibilities and potentialities for clown with an acknowledgement that there is a broad range of clowning, which does include some common practices. These include a typology of clown, for example, the ‘clown trio’, but also a spectrum of clown practices against which I can measure my own clowning, which I discussed in Chapter Two. The typology is not fixed, and the spectrum is personal to each individual, and, as my genealogical survey has revealed, the typology develops and changes. In my own case this happened imperceptibly, without me noticing until I came to write about it in this retrospective reflection. Because of this slow change of development over time the origins are not completely eradicated, although they may be shadowy. They can be glimpsed in the current practices of the specific clown. This is true of my own work and practice, but I have also come to realise that there is ecology of this evolution, in that the enmeshment reaches out to enfold others with whom I have collaboratively shared particular practices, discussions and ideas around the nature of clowning. The range of these collaborators includes academic colleagues, other practitioners in many areas of performance, students, teachers, friends, audiences, advisors and relatives. Their sometimes unwitting insights have provided a collaborative network which has helped me understand my practice and its relationship to the institution.

The model which perhaps serves as the best schema for this network is Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Rhizome’ as described in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988: 3-28), which connects all and every point, as well as mixing and juxtaposing practices which are very different in their nature. This model is important for my ongoing and still developing clown practice, and is especially important for my role of the dramaturg clown analysed in Chapter Six, as the rhizome is not based upon a hierarchical model, with myself at the top as director, but is based around a fluctuating group of people, who do not all know each other, although there are sub-groups, which are overlapping. The connecting thread between all these collaborators is Richard as clown. I insist that I am not a fixed point at the centre of the network, but in

keeping with a common situation of the clown I am mainly hovering off to the side somewhere, occasionally taking a central place and position. Where my network differs from the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari is that it is based on a range of selected performances, which I have discussed, and in many of these examples it includes the temporary and fleeting but vital relationship with the spectators. Yet the sense of exchange between spectator and clown, especially in *The Village Fete* and to a lesser extent *The Misguided Tour*, may have a depth and resonance beyond the temporality of the engagement. This is partly due to the involvement in the shared space which I have discussed at length throughout this thesis, but is also because, in my view, the clown has particular attributes, based around play and subversion, which provide a specific praxis for the dramaturgy of the clown. As I have analysed in Chapter Six, it may well be that from time to time every dramaturg adopts some practices which may be identified as clownesque, as dramaturg Steven Canny notes, ‘Indeed, as Canny suggests, the dramaturg needs to contribute and be ‘full of mischief’ (Turner and Behrndt 2008: 183). The praxis of the dramaturg clown, however, is more focussed than occasional clownesque fooling and uses the specific attributes of the clown to deploy their dramaturgy.

However, so much for the conundrum! For what has nagged at me throughout the doing of this project is that I do have a specific vision of the clown, not as much as a definition, but certainly a bundle of characteristics which can be enmeshed with the slippery practices of the clown. In Chapter Two of this study, ‘Three’s Company’ I briefly discussed the concept of the ‘Disguised Clown’ which originated during discussions about clown practice between myself, and director and clown performer John Lee. This concept permitted us to engage with and develop a broader range of clown practices than is suggested by the classical clown trio, the Lecoq clown, the political clowning of Dario Fo, or the existential clowning of Vladimir Olshansky. The concept of ‘The Disguised Clown’ allowed us to synthesise all these practices. It enabled us to discuss the clown without having to attempt to define the clown, and has been in effect a get out clause for fixed definitions. However it is important to recognise that the term can become so broad that almost any clownesque practice can be identified as clown. For example, in their show, *A Western* (2010), the performance duo Action Hero present iconic moments of Western films using the simplest means: a cowboy

hat, tomato ketchup for blood, a children's racing bike as a horse, a pack of cards. Performing in the bar of a theatre they use their audience, who are seated at tables, and the specific actual space, which will be different each time they perform, to great and comic effect, exploring the disjunction between the epic nature of the Western and the paucity of their set and props. Whilst there are clownesque moments throughout, for example, the hero orders a whisky at the bar, and then motions the barman to slide it along the bar to him standing at the other end, although the glass only travels about half a metre. Many other sequences work in a similar vein and are wonderfully funny. There are moments of great clowning but nevertheless the performers are in no sense clowns. Their performance owes much more to live art practices than clown, although without the hard definition, I am hard pressed to say why exactly. Perhaps it is better to state the opposite: that all clowns are, in fact, disguised clowns, including those who employ the standard signifiers, the motley and slap, of the traditional clown.

What I mean by this is that the clown performer adopts the disguise of the clown so that he or she can say and do those things which they are not permitted to say and do in their everyday, real lives. Their audiences recognise this and, to some extent, the clown is a projection of the hopes, fears and desires of her audience. In addition, licence is given to the clown by the institution to transgress, play with and subvert the practices of the institution. This licence is discretionary and may be withdrawn at any time, without explanation or reason. This localised licence mirrors and reflects our human, existentialist situation, our contingency and 'thrownness' ('geworfenheit'), to use Heidegger's term (1962: throughout), where we are thrown into the world, exist for a brief time, and then are removed through death. We disguise ourselves as players on the stage of the world, but in the end our disguise is revealed as just that. Likewise the clown adopts disguises, and whatever disguises the clown adopts, be it vicar, dramaturg, auguste, pitre, waiting tramp, cyclist, political fool, behind the disguise, but also enmeshed with the disguise, stands the figure of the clown who is open, playful and naïve. Through his or her hopeful optimism, the illogicality and arbitrariness of the institution, with its claims to certainty and its emphasis on proper systems and structures, is revealed. The clown achieves this through practices of a lateral but equally compelling logic, of deferral of the point and of identity, of liberation from the real and the everyday, whilst

paradoxically being grounded in the materiality of the world. The clown allows the audience to recognise his or her existential situation, and through the complicity of play the burden of human hopelessness and contingency is lifted. This may only last for a brief time before the world seemingly reverts and continues as though nothing has happened. Nevertheless, in that brief time the catalyst for great change has been set in motion. It is in this clownesque moment and others like it, which I have identified throughout the writing of this project, that the clown's connection with and subversion of the institution is at its most potent and is able to be realised. What has been generally apparent throughout the history of the clown is that the subversion and criticism of institutional practices by the clown are not in themselves offering a solution. The clown in this sense is not a positivist utopian, presenting an alternative social structure other than one of playfulness. However, it seems to me that the practices of the dramaturg clown which I have sketched in previous chapters, do suggest that there might be another way forward for the role of the clown - from that of playful critic to that of the 'map maker and compass bearer' who plays a collaborative role in creating alternatives to the, at times, repressive practices of the institution.

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